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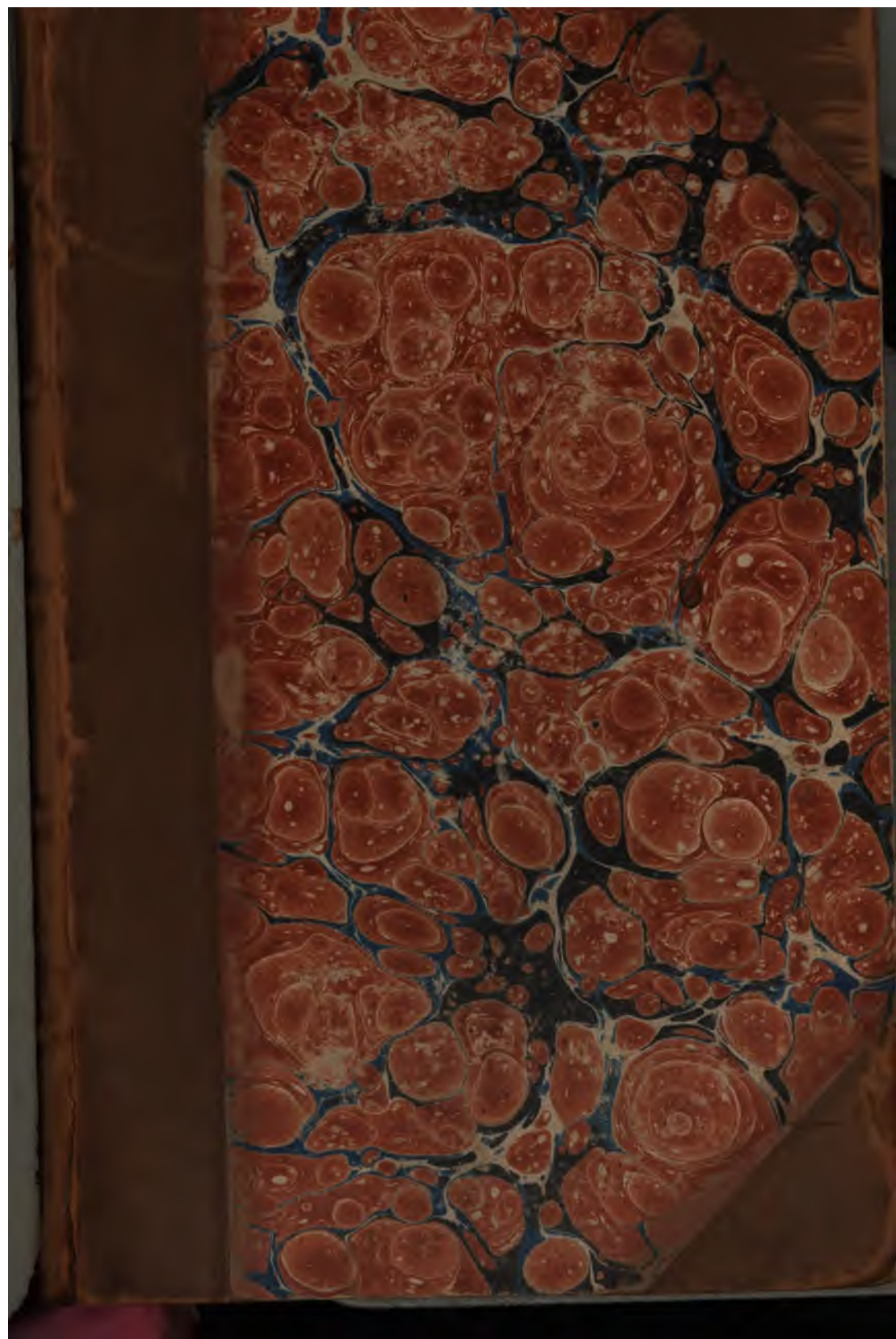
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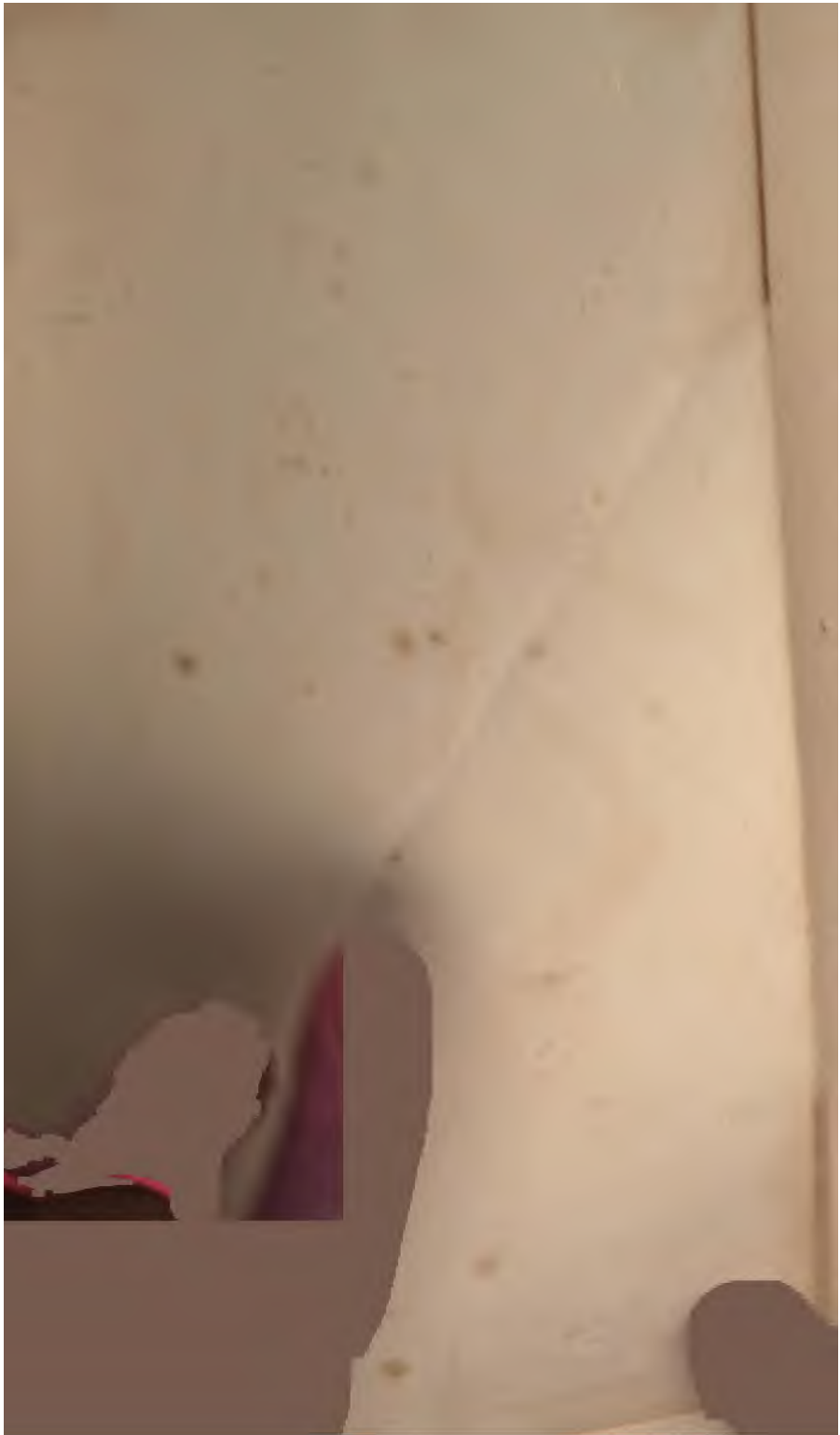




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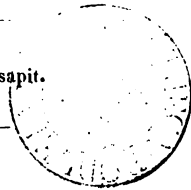
ON THE

FEELINGS, PASSIONS, MANNERS, AND
PURSUITS OF MEN.

BY THE LATE

FRANCIS ROSCOMMON, Esq.

Hominem pagina nostra sapit.



LONDON:

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INTRODUCTION.

POOR FRANK ROSCOMMON ! I knew him from his boyhood, and little thought I should live to perform for him the last offices of duty and affection. In the discharge of these, it has fallen to my lot to superintend the publication of the Letters which form the present volume. The first of the series will explain their origin and design. They were addressed to myself, very irregularly, sometimes at long and sometimes at short intervals, through a protracted course of years. In the exercise of that discretion which he empowered and entreated me to use, I have taken

from a large bundle such a selection as I thought would be generally interesting, and best serve the reputation of the writer, consulting the present taste of the age—the taste, in truth, of all ages—by choosing such as are of a light and entertaining nature in preference to the grave and didactic.

With some powers of thought and considerable knowledge, acquired by multifarious and desultory reading, my friend had an indolence of disposition, which could indeed be roused into a state of exertion, but could not be long maintained there ; and to this may be ascribed the general brevity of his reflections and the variety of his subjects. I have arranged the letters pretty nearly in the order in which they were written ; and if the reader discover rather more gravity of matter and

style in the latter part of the volume than in the former, he will easily account for it when he considers the effect of increasing years on the feelings of the happiest and the views of the wisest of mankind.

It may perhaps throw some light on the letters to state, that my friend was a man of independent, although not of extensive, property. He had married in early youth, and married happily, but his domestic felicity had been prematurely destroyed by the loss of his wife and her infant son in less than three years from the wedding-day. To dissipate the sorrow and mental restlessness produced by these melancholy events, he travelled over a great part of Europe and America; and, yielding his spirit to the impressions which the wonderful and magnificent scenes through which he passed were

adapted to make, he gradually recovered a healthy tone of mind. On his return, he settled down in a beautiful retreat in the county of ———, out of which he occasionally emerged, to spend a few weeks in town. From his sensibility to the grace and softness of the female character, I fully expected to hear of his soon marrying again; but either he met with no one congenial to his taste, or he too fondly cherished the memory of his youthful love, to yield to the fascination which it appears he did not altogether escape; for he died as he had long lived, single and solitary.

His pursuits latterly were chiefly of an intellectual and literary nature. He was, on the whole, a kind-hearted and happy being, fond of contemplation, and not disliking society; independent in fortune,

temperate in habits, upright in thought and conduct ; but somewhat indolent, from a want of strong motives to be otherwise. Thus much I have deemed it well to communicate of my friend's history and character, to enable the reader to enter more fully into the spirit of his writings. The qualities of his mind, however, will be best gathered from the Letters themselves, from which I will no longer detain those whose curiosity may have been excited by the few particulars here introduced.

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LETTERS FOR THE PRESS.

LETTER I.

Resolution to turn Author—Various Subjects and Schemes—
Project of writing a Series of Letters—Advantages of the
Plan—Friendly Criticism.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IT is now several weeks since you and I quitted the hospitable roof of our friend M——: you to resume the bustle of active life, I to retire once more to my cottage and my books. You will recollect our conversation about indolence and ennui, and your strenuous exhortations that I should try to diversify the monotony of my existence, by devoting some portion of my time to literary composition. I was certainly struck with the force of your remarks, and, a few days after my return, I began to revolve in my mind how I could put your advice in practice. The difficulty was on what species of composition and on what sub-

ject to fix. First one thing and then another suggested itself, till I had run through the whole circle of the sciences. I thought of poetry, but that requires a peculiar cast of genius; and, although I was fond of making verses at seventeen, time has somewhat untuned my feelings, and left me little of that inclination to rhyme which once developed itself in odes, elegies, and sonnets. Besides, in the present day, we have poetry in excess: there are innumerable writers of pretty and even elegant verses, which few persons trouble themselves to read. To surpass even what is thus neglected would be extremely difficult, and I feel little disposition to write what would probably be perused by nobody but the author. Poetry, then, being put out of the question, I began to consider the other departments of literature and science. Political economy I found too difficult, metaphysics too dry, criticism threadbare, moral essays out of fashion. A comedy, a tragedy, a political pamphlet, a novel, a school-book, a tale, a history—all these by turns presented themselves to my mind, and were successively discarded, some as beyond my powers, and others as repugnant

to my taste. At length, a project flashed upon my imagination, flattering to my indolence from its apparent facility. It was nothing more or less than to write a series of letters to yourself on any subjects which might happen to strike me. I resolved to have no plan, no shackles, no limits—to give way to my thoughts and feelings, to be grave when I liked, and witty when I could. This project entirely displaced another, which, of all that I had thought upon, seemed likely to be the favourite—and that was, to write a number of unconnected essays. In writing essays, however, there is a sort of formality and constraint. You scarcely know how to begin the subject. If you plunge into it at once, you seem abrupt; if you make a regular exordium, you grow tedious. In writing letters, on the contrary, you can never be at a loss, at least for the three first words: you at once secure the monosyllables, “My dear friend;” and when you have thus gained a footing, there is less difficulty in going on. Such were my ruminations as I sat on a bench in my garden, the freshness of spring breathing around me, and the sun illuminating with his parting beams that lively

prospect which you know too well for me to describe. I resolved to take that night to mature the plan of my first letter, and to begin the labour of composition the following morning. Next morning, accordingly, I commenced in good earnest; that is, I arranged my writing-desk, selected a proper sheet of paper, and pointed a fine clear quill. My constitutional indolence would proceed no farther: a sort of apathy stole over me: not an idea would distil from the end of my pen. I sat gazing at the fire, waiting for the inspiration necessary for my purpose: a thousand reveries flitted through my head, but it was all in vain, they refused to take a material shape: not a word would come; and at last, under the pretext that a book would suggest some ideas suitable to my design, I took up "Ivanhoe," which was fresh from my booksellers', and which I had destined for the entertainment of the afternoon. As I laid my hand on the first volume, all the consequences of what I was doing rushed on my mind: I clearly foresaw, that if I persisted, I should not be able to write a syllable the whole day, and in the manful resolution to adhere to my first purpose,

I quitted my hold. I had no sooner done so, than my dislike of exertion returned : the prospect of sitting with pen in hand for several hours, without being able to wring out a single sentence, glared upon my imagination : Ivanhoe looked uncommonly fascinating : the paper seemed good, the type clear : the eulogium pronounced upon it the preceding evening by a lady, who exclaimed in surprise, “What ! not read Ivanhoe ?” rose upon my recollection, and rung in my ear : with a desperate resolution I seized the book, and plunged into all its fascination. There was an end at once to letter-writing ; and since that time, various circumstances, joined to the unpleasant remembrance of my former failure, have prevented me from resuming the pen, till the present moment. Having, to use the common phrase, broken the ice, I begin to relish my project. I seem to myself to enjoy the gentle exercise of the faculties which it demands : “*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute,*” said a French lady (I may be mistaken in the sex), and I really think I shall find it so. Already, a number of advantages figure before my imagination : videlicet, what with composing, blotting out, and copying, I

shall have regular employment for two or three hours in the day ; I shall improve my faculties, and possibly become a more profound and consistent thinker ; and I shall attain facility in the art of composition. It is possible my letters, when collected together, may make a book : a book, in modern times, is often productive both of profit and of fame ; mine may prove what others have proved before it ; and should the result be otherwise, it will be no great matter. I shall not be left worse than I am, either in pocket or reputation. Thus, it appears that I am sure to obtain some advantages, and cannot incur any risks—a dilemma in which I am excessively fond of being placed.

As to your part of the affair—the reading of the letters—I hope it will not prove intolerably burdensome, since I shall regularly transmit them to you as they are written. A manuscript volume of letters might alarm you into a nervous fever, but a single sheet may prove only a gentle soporific. By this arrangement, I shall at the same time serve my own purposes. In writing a book, the object to be attained is rather too distant for a man of indolent habits, or one acting under no strong feeling ; no very

sanguine hopes of success : it is a great object, indeed, but he appears to make no progress towards it, and he is apt to give way to indifference or despondency. By breaking my work into letters, to be regularly transmitted to a friend, I shall have a succession of objects—of less importance, to be sure—but objects within my reach, or towards which my advances will be sufficiently perceptible. This method, by the way, of accomplishing an important end by means of a succession of subordinate objects, which allure us forward by their proximity, and by the ease with which they promise to be attained, may be made a powerful instrument of good. Why is it that a boy makes a progress more rapidly, and with less mental oppression, in certain kinds of knowledge (languages, for instance), than a man of mature age? It is partly because the boy is led on by a series of objects near at hand ; he is influenced, not by the distant prospect of mastering the language, but by the immediate desire of avoiding the castigation consequent on neglect, or of surpassing some rival stripling of the same class ; he has every day a fresh object, or a continually renewed

motive : while the man, having in sight only the distant good to which a single step is no perceptible approach, is apt to be disheartened by a perpetual reference of his efforts to his ultimate aim, by slow progress and disappointed expectation.

If I expect you to read my letters, I shall most assuredly not impose upon you the task of criticising them. A man must have made but a slight acquaintance with human nature, not to be aware that criticism is of little use to the writer for whose benefit it is so kindly intended. Should it even be received with a proper spirit of gratitude and humility, it can do no more, generally speaking, than prune a few redundancies, or correct a few oversights, such as little affect the substantial merits or demerits of the composition. These are necessarily impressions of the qualities of the author's mind, and it is impossible that any criticism should infuse new power into his intellect. The friendly critic, besides, runs risks to which I really cannot think of exposing you : his remarks are generally received with coldness, if not with strong marks of offended pride ; notwithstanding the feeble smile which

attempts to express that they are acceptable, they are tacitly felt as personal offences; and they inevitably lower the talents and judgment of the critic in the estimation of the writer. In reflecting on myself, indeed, I cannot help thinking that I am free from this weakness, and could receive your animadversions with pleasure and with profit; but yet, when I look around, and see my neighbours all infected with the foible, it is impossible to resist the conclusion, that my own apparent freedom from it is one of the illusions of self-love. Such being the case, it would be wrong to expose you to these evils. I therefore ask for no criticism, no censure, no panegyric. The tax I intend to levy upon you is simply the postage of the letters; and since I may be too indolent to make copies, my only request is, that you would manfully resist any inclination which you may feel for consigning them to the flames.

Farewell.

F.R.

LETTER II.

A Morning in Spring—Rareness of a Taste for the Beauties of Nature—Hardship of being condemned to a Town Life at this season of the Year—Poem on the subject.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am glad you like my project, whatever you may ultimately think of its execution. I shall therefore proceed with new vigour and alacrity. Even the slight praise implied in the approval of a scheme not realized, confers pleasure. I am gratified, too, that you have found so good a precedent in the example of Seneca. In one respect (if all that is said by learned men be true) I shall possess an advantage over that eminent writer: I mean in the circumstance of having an actual correspondent, and thus being able to disencumber myself of my productions as they are written; whereas the author of the *EPISTOLÆ MORALES* is supposed by some of his commentators (Lipsius, for instance), to have assumed the epistolary form merely as an eligible vehicle for the conveyance of his thoughts, without any regular

transmission of the letters to the friend to whom they are addressed. The Roman, according to this theory, seems to have been as sensible as myself of the convenience of not being shackled by formal methods, or tethered to a particular subject—of taking up the pen only when he was in the humour for writing, and laying it down when he had nothing more to say. Beyond this I fear there are few points of resemblance between us, and I have certainly no pretensions to his weight and gravity, as I shall forthwith proceed to prove.

I am now sitting in my little parlour, and if you were here, man of business as you are, you could not help feeling enchanted. It is one of the richest mornings in spring: vegetation is bursting forth with a progress almost visible to the eye. The hawthorn hedges are nearly in full foliage, and display that tender green, so delightful yet so evanescent. The lilac, the poplar, the elm, the beech, the sycamore, exhibit various degrees of forwardness: some are in bud, some in leaf, and others in that state of imperfect expansion, half bud, half leaf, which has a grace and elegance, if not a richness, to be remarked at no other

time. The lively verdure of the fields is so grateful to the eye, that I could gaze upon it for ever : a delicate fragrance breathes from the sweetbriar, and from a number of the early garden-flowers, and there is a peculiar scent of freshness from the opening buds of a hundred shrubs and trees. But, above all, the melody of innumerable birds sends a delicious sensation to the heart. Even now, as I sit with my window open, I can distinguish the skylark, the wren, the chaffinch, the linnet, and the thrush in such charming confusion, that it is almost impossible to follow the notes of any of them. Besides, if I attempt it, my attention is immediately called to some other "rill of song" which bubbles up close to my ear. To a vacant mind it is "enchantment all," and I am irresistibly led to exclaim, with the poet—

" Oh ! Nature, how in every charm supreme,
Whose votaries feed on rapture ever new ;
Oh ! for the voice and fire of seraphim,
To sing thy glories with devotion due !"

You will probably smile at all this as enthusiasm, and I have no doubt you will find many to join you. There are few, as far as my ob-

servation extends, who enjoy the beauties of nature with much zest. Persons in general can relish a poetical description of them and feel an exhilaration of spirits when they exchange the smoky atmosphere of a town for the pure air and fresh verdure of the fields; but they cannot dwell upon them without weariness for any length of time, nor enter at all into their minuter appearances. Natural scenery does very well connected with other objects, with the pleasures of company and conversation, and the animation of exercise; but take these away, and it ceases to be a source of enjoyment. He, however, who has the true tone of feeling, the genuine taste, sees, with indescribable emotions, not only the general appearance of objects, but graces and beauties unmarked by other eyes. He dwells with delight on the peculiar form of a tree, the rich tint of a flower, the lights and shades of a landscape, the blue depths of the sky, and requires nothing else to fill his mind:—

“ The meanest flow’ret of the dale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise.”

My own taste for the beauties of the woods and fields is as old as my recollection. I have some curious reminiscences of walks with my nurse amongst groves and gardens, and of gathering daisies, buttercups, wood-anemones, and blue-bells. I even yet feel the awe with which I gazed in very early life on the magnificence of the sky, when the evening sun had left behind it a gorgeous mass of brilliant colours, or when the deep azure of heaven gave prominence to piles of silver clouds, amongst which my imagination was transported to lose itself. I distinctly recollect, too, that at school I had no great relish for my tasks in fine weather; and when the sun's rays fell into our gloomy school-room, and I looked out and saw the smiling sky, I felt it hard to be shut up a great part of the day, instead of cropping kingcups in the meadows, or lying on the grass with my hand over my eyes, looking at the skylark. I have ever since had an aversion to being cooped up in a room in summer: I pant for the open air and the blue canopy. Even when I read or write, I throw my window open, that I may feel the freshness of the atmosphere, and catch the melody of the

sanguine hope is a good object
 indeed, but it is not a good
 towards it, and it is not a good
 ference nor interest. In looking at
 work into letters, it is not a good
 to a friend, I shall not be a good
 —of less importance to the world than
 within my reach. It is not a good
 vances will be a good thing. The
 method, by the way, is not a good
 important end by itself, but it is a good
 subordinate objects, and it is a good
 by their proximity, and it is a good
 they promise to be a good thing.
 powerful instrument of a good thing.
 a boy makes a progress in a good
 less mental oppression. It is a good
 knowledge (language) is a good
 man of mature age? It is a good
 boy is led on by a good thing.
 hand; he is a good thing.
 prospect is a good thing.
 immediate is a good thing.
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delightful thoughts of home and former times. At that period, when life was new and hope young, my feelings would sometimes run into verse: it is no wonder they did so on this occasion. I present you with the stanzas, as a faithful picture of my feelings, without any profession of modesty, any deprecation of criticism, or any suggestions that their faults may be attributed to the youth of the writer.

TO A TREE,

On seeing it come into Leaf in the centre of the Metropolis.

Where London's massive temples rise,
And dusky houses bound the view ;
Where art puts on her gayest guise,
While murky vapours in the skies
Veil nature's simple blue ;

Where morning never sheds her fires,
Save to bedeck the towers with gold
Or flash her radiance on the spires ;
Where evening's warmest blush expires
Unnoticed and untold ;

I met thee there in budding pride,
A lonely beauty in the scene ;
For ah ! 'tis long since at thy side
Spring saw the daisy opening wide,
Or violet's humbler mien.

And ne'er did finch or throistle make
 Within thy shade his downy nest ;
His song of love did ne'er awake,
Or, hopping lightly on thee, shake
 The dew-drops from thy crest.

Methinks thy form ill suits that place,
 Thy root strikes through ungenial ground ;
Thou ~~wouldst~~ have waved with nobler grace
Where textile forests interlace,
 And freshness breathes around.

But when I saw thee, nature's child !
 A spark of joy thou didst relume
Within my breast ; with transport wild
Fair fancy waved her wand, and smiled
 Athwart the opening gloom.

I saw entranced my native home,
 My native fields thick strewn with flowers,
The shaggy rock, the cascade's foam,
The wild woods where I used to roam,
 And amaranthine bowers.

My cares, my griefs, were all forgot,
 And peace resumed her mild command ;
Hope from thy branches told my lot,
That I should see again that spot,
 And tread that smiling land.

Thus, 'midst a world of adverse gloom,
 Religion rears her heavenly form ;
She strikes a radiance through the tomb,
The glances of her eye illumine,
 And gild fate's gathering storm.

She points to scenes beyond the sky,
That live when worlds shall pass away,
Far glimmering on the mortal eye,
Where we shall dwell in ecstasy,
And bask in boundless day.

I love, I confess, to run over these passages of my youth, to fling myself back into days gone by, and thus to renew something of what the poet finely terms "the tender bloom of heart." Since those days, I have seen something more of the world : I have visited many grand and beautiful scenes of nature ; I have expatiated over the charms of Windermere, and been struck with the sublimities of Borrowdale. I have gazed up from the foot of Mont Blanc, and climbed to the summit of Etna ; I have seen the Andes frowning with tempests ; I have heard the roaring of the German Ocean, and been tossed by the storms of the Atlantic ; I have

" Travell'd by the deep Saint Lawrence' tide,
And by Niagara's cataract of foam ;"

and yet such is the universal power of nature, that I can still enjoy the scenes which charmed my infant eye, tame and sober as they comparatively are, without perceiving that they lose

any thing of their effect by a contrast with the grandest of her works. Indeed, nothing appears to me more unfortunate for the purpose of enjoyment, than an exclusive taste in natural scenery. There is beauty in every variety of it ; there is always something to admire, be the scene and the season what they may. With what pleasure I have frequently gazed on the flat extent of a barren common, covered with the brown heath of early spring, and presenting an almost uniform surface ! Yet the fresh breeze blowing over it, the bright blue sky shining above it, and a cloud-shadow partially resting upon it in the distance, have combined to invest it with positive beauty. And in the twilight, the sombre uniformity of the waste, with the mild lustre of the western sky just beyond it, exhibiting long lines of pale clouds, with a back-ground of delicate azure, and deepening by contrast the gloom of the darkening landscape, has almost risen into sublimity.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER III.

Disappointments in a Literary Career—Modern Criticism—
Anxieties of an unpractised Writer—First Attempt of a
young Poet to enter the Temple of Fame.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

There is one circumstance in modern literature which I often think of with pain : it is, that a number of delicate and sensitive minds, full of ardent aspirations after excellence, romantic notions and anticipations of fame and honours, are necessarily overwhelmed with disappointment in their literary career. I say necessarily, on several accounts. In the first place, there are many men of undoubted genius, who, from the peculiar structure of their minds, cannot put their conceptions into a popular form ; there are others again, whose estimate of their own talents, formed perhaps from their capability of enjoying, with great zest, the masterly productions of others, is much too high ; there are others who meet with adverse circumstances, ill-natured criticisms, or other checks and discouragements, trifling in appearance, but causes of powerful

operation on the feelings of those against whom they are directed. Besides, there must be much disappointment where there are many competitors : excellence is comparative,—the higher the level of mediocrity is raised, the more difficult it is to rise above it.

Whatever are the causes, it is obvious, that where the cultivation of letters prevails so extensively as it does in our own country, the effect will take place ; and I cannot, for my own part help feeling for the blighted hopes of many a pure, sensitive, and enthusiastic mind. The modern critic thinks little of these things : he takes up the volume of a young author to review, and marks the ambition and the weakness of his victim with a triumphant self-complacency in his own superior knowledge of life, and power of estimating the chances of success. If he is one of the ill-natured tribe, he takes occasion to show the dexterity with which he can disentangle faults from the beauties which concealed them from a duller discrimination. If he is a benevolent critic, he thinks he is conferring a kindness, by recommending the writer to desist from the unprofitable pursuit of poetry, what-

ever else he may have attempted, for which nature has not adapted him, and to turn his attention to some branch of the common business of life ; as if the transition from high hopes of literary excellence to some other object could be as easily accomplished as recommended. He reflects not that there is one mind to which every word that he is penning is a dagger ; that, simple as it may seem to him, this lowering of high hopes, this abandonment of cherished schemes, is the destruction of a system of happiness, and involves a total alteration in the moral and intellectual character ; and that the failure, which must be inevitable if there is little real merit, is an evil requiring no aggravation from insensibility, dull-sighted kindness, or intentional malignity. The plea, that it is necessary to protect the public from crude works, to save our literature from debasement, and to repress dulness and unfounded pretension, cannot avail much with any man of sense, who is aware that nothing but sterling excellence can permanently support any work in the public opinion ; and that, as guardians of our literature from the contamination of what is worthless and

in bad taste, the critics are of very dubious utility.

When a young writer sends his first production into the world, he feels an anxiety so intense as to appear out of all proportion, to cool observers. We should probably find a good deal of the ludicrous in his feelings, could we trace all his reveries of hope; could we see the visions of glory which dawn upon his imagination; could we penetrate into the structures of happiness which he has reared on the fragile basis of future fame; could we mark the agitation which the merest whisper of censure or applause is sufficient to create; the high estimates of self-importance, the gasping of intense interest, the occasional qualms and misgivings when any thing happens to cool the imagination, and the final fall from the sublime heights of hope and confidence, to the level of other people's opinions. In all this, if there is a good deal to be laughed at, there is a great deal to be pitied; and he must have a heart worse than unfeeling, who at such a moment can take a pleasure in demolishing those brilliant illusions, which would fall quite soon enough if left to themselves.

I was indulging in some remarks of this sort a few days ago to our friend B——, who, you know, is of a very cool and sedate temperament, when he surprised me by saying, that he could very well enter into all the feelings of a young author, as he had once experienced them himself. “When I was a boy of sixteen,” he continued, “I used to fancy that I possessed wonderful talents for poetry. I was so pleased with my own verses, that I began to feel ‘the longing after immortality,’ the generous desire of imparting in perpetuity to others some of that delight which filled my own breast. I accordingly looked out for some means of appearing in print. A writer in the present age is not under any necessity of remaining unknown for lack of the opportunity of standing at the bar of the public. Every newspaper has a corner dedicated to literature and the muses. It was in one of these that I thought I clearly saw the path to fame. I determined to risk the publication of a few verses in the weekly journal of a neighbouring town, and with this view selected one of my best pieces, and employed three weeks in the arduous task of correction. At length, in my own apprehension, it was

faultless, and I made a fair copy on a sheet of gilt-edged paper. It was one fine evening in autumn, just after sunset, when a few stars had already come out of the sky, and the air was fresh and balmy, that I sallied forth, with my manuscript in my pocket, and my imagination inflated with gorgeous visions of fame, and immense conceptions of my own importance. I looked down with some contempt on several groups of boys, who had protracted their sports till it was almost too dark to continue them ; and as I passed through the streets of the town, and cast my eyes into the shops which were lighted up, I could not help feeling pity for men destined to pass their lives in dealing out soap and calico, and contrasting their occupations with the dignity and elegance of my own pursuits. During these feelings and reflections, I reached the office of the printer, and watching my opportunity, when nobody was near, I safely deposited my manuscript in the box designed to receive the favours of correspondents like myself. My heart beat as I heard it drop, and reflected that I had now passed the Rubicon, and must take the consequences. For a moment, I half repented what

I had done. The feeling of doubt as to its success, however, passed away as rapidly as the sound which occasioned it, and the exultation of self-importance returned. I strode through the streets with all the dignity prompted by conceit operating in the dark ; again looked into the shops, and again felt pity, on contrasting the counter and the Hill of Parnassus. The three days which elapsed before the publication of the next newspaper, would have seemed an age, had I not spent them in the delightful reveries of hope. On the eventful morning, I saw the newsman approach the house, and, running to meet him, I snatched the paper out of his hand. It was wet from the press, but I was not of course in a mood for stopping to dry it. I hastily turned to the poet's corner. I saw some verses—my heart palpitated—they were my own ! What are the delightful sensations of a mother, on seeing her first-born child, I do not know ; but they can scarcely surpass those of an author, on such an occasion as this.

“ In the evening I walked to the town, eager to catch some whispers of that fame which I doubted not would be accorded to the author

of such verses. I had not put my signature to them, but had subscribed the classical and pastoral name of Tityrus ; and, as I approached the town, I could not help picturing in my imagination the ardent curiosity with which every body must be inflamed to discover the writer. I called on one or two of my friends, in full expectation that I should hear their opinions on so interesting a topic, knowing as I did that they were most resolute readers of the newspaper, from beginning to end, advertisements included. 'Have you seen the paper of to-day?' said Mr. Leonard, with an air of exultation, as I entered his drawing-room. The blood instantly rushed to my face, and I could scarcely conceal my agitation, as I replied in the affirmative. 'Then,' said he, 'you must have seen, in one corner of it,' (here my agitation increased), 'that my fine young friend Sedley has at last got married. I am so pleased, that I am just going to set off to pay the young couple a visit.' He then proceeded to give me the whole history of the match, expatiating upon it with so much enjoyment and prolixity, that there was evidently no place for any other topic. I therefore took my leave,

secretly wishing that marriages had been interdicted, at least for one week. Individuals, thought I, as I left the house, are too much occupied at home with their own concerns ; I shall find those who resort to the coffee-room more at leisure to enjoy literary beauties. This reflection banished the remembrance of my recent disappointment ; my anticipations of fame returned with all their force ; and I felt no doubt that I should find groups of gentlemen in the coffee-room discussing the merits of my poetry, and relieving their curiosity to know the author by various conjectures. After debating with myself a long time, whether I should stand aloof, listening to their encomiums, or avow myself at once as the writer, I reached the door just as I had determined to pursue a middle course, and announce my knowledge of the author, without disclosing his name. I entered the room with an air of more than usual pleasure, which however was a little allayed on finding few persons there. Placing myself in a snug corner, and seizing a newspaper by way of pretext, I sat listening to the conversation which occasionally arose. Not a word, however, could I hear, but about the

French and the price of stocks. Numbers left the room, and numbers replaced them, but still it was all the same—not a syllable about Tityrus or poetry. After waiting two hours, my patience became exhausted, and I quitted the place. I had entered the town in the full and eager anticipation of fame, and expecting with confidence that all the world would be trying to find out the author who had that day distinguished himself in the Poet's Corner; but I left it with the discovery, that the world went on very quietly in the old track, and were very apt to be occupied with their own individual concerns, without troubling themselves with either prose or poetry, or losing their time in attempts to find out the secrets of Philo, Belinda, Juvenis, or Tityrus."

If you are half as much amused with this narrative as I was, you will be indebted to me for a pleasant quarter of an hour. The manner in which it was delivered, the humorous tones and expressive looks which threw over the whole an indescribable richness—chaste, yet comic—your own imagination must supply, from the recollection of those delightful evenings which you have spent in the company of

the narrator, and many of which I had the happiness of sharing.

On looking over the remarks at the commencement of my letter, it occurs to me to add, in order to guard against misconstruction, that I would not be understood as objecting to fair, and what may appear to the author whose work is the subject of it, even severe animadversion. I cannot help thinking, however, that the considerations I have urged, are sufficient to show how incumbent it is on the critic to abstain scrupulously from transgressing the line of just censure, and that there are few evils likely to arise from such criticism as is lenient while it is discriminating. In one hope I would fain indulge—that the day will soon be passed for mistaking severity for cleverness. Every one who has at all reflected on the subject knows, that it requires ten times more ability to praise pertinently than to censure freely.

You will perceive that I am a strenuous advocate of my own interests in my future capacity of an author, delivered *bound* into the hands of the critics. While in the lax and pleasant state of manuscript, I, in common

with other writers, am in the agreeable danger of being ruined by flattery, without any assignable risk of condemnation. Is it not wonderful that those who are enjoying the one should be so eager to rush upon the other ?

I am, &c.,

F. R.

LETTER IV.

Female Beauty—Falling in Love—Narrative of an Incident of this kind—The Drawing-Room, a Poem.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As I was yesterday sauntering along a narrow rural lane, fenced with rich hawthorn hedges, and elms hanging over them, an abrupt turn of the road brought me into almost close contact with a fine blooming girl, apparently not out of her teens. There was a little embarrassment on both sides at this unexpected rencounter. I endeavoured to make way for her, and she doing the same for me, we were once more on the point of collision. To prevent it, I was under the necessity of gently grasping her arm, and, with a suitable apology for the circumstance, I passed on, but not before I had gazed with deep admiration on a face lovely in every feature, but rendered a thousand times more so by an enchanting confusion of smiles and blushes ; nor till I had heard the tones of a voice soft and musical as Apollo's lute, replying to my apology with a

grace and sweetness wholly indescribable. She left in my heart one of those "pangs more dear than pleasure" which are not easily got quit of. I was forcibly reminded of those exquisite lines of the poet, which surely every mind of sensibility must have verified hundreds of times. She was exactly such a one as he so finely describes :—

" One of those forms which flit by us, when we
Are young, and fix our eyes on every face ;
And oh ! the loveliness at times we see
In momentary gliding, the soft grace,
The youth, the bloom, the beauty, which agree
In many a nameless being we retrace,
Whose course and home we know not nor shall know,
Like the lost Pleiad seen no more below."

I am, as you know, rather too old for falling in love at first sight, but this sweet countenance made a more than usual impression on me, by forcibly suggesting the circumstances of my first boyish passion. It is a strange phenomenon, this said falling in love, and, I believe, no definition or analysis can throw any light upon it. In the course of my desultory attempts at composition, I was once struck with the idea of writing an essay or analytical treatise on the subject, but soon abandoned it as too fugitive

and impalpable ; not, however, without some strenuous efforts to accomplish my purpose. I fixed myself several times at my desk, and began scrutinizing and analyzing with all my might. I set out, perhaps, with some profound reflection, but directly the image of Miss S—— started up in my mind, with a thousand accompanying recollections of the scenes where we had been together, the conversations we had enjoyed, the little incidents in a growing attachment, so fascinating and so indescribable. When I was recalled from these reveries by the sound of the clock, I found the ink dry in my pen, the first sentence of my treatise standing solitary at the top of the clean white sheet, and myself full two hours nearer the end of my life without being aware how I had got so far. It was a sad waste of time, and I gave the matter up. It would have been a curious work, you may rest assured, and, perhaps, some time or other, in one of my fits of extraordinary expansion of heart, I may show you the fragments, which I have religiously preserved, and which, when I happen to encounter them in looking over my papers, always afford me a hearty laugh. A narrative of an actual event of this

sort is, however, worth a whole library of formal treatises, and I have a great mind, for want of a better subject, to give you a history of my first exploit in this way. To be sure, there will be a sort of egotism in it, but what is there more interesting than egotism on such a topic? It will be exposing one's weakness, too. The wise, the grave, the learned, the philosophical, may not plead guilty to the degradation of being captivated by a lovely woman, but, for my own part, I have none of this high bearing. One of our poets confesses—

“ Fearless, a soul that does not always think.”

And I am equally fearless in avowing a heart that is not always proof against the fascination of female charms. Why should a man be ashamed of some of the most interesting feelings belonging to his nature? Here, then, is the whole narrative. It was soon after I had quitted the mansion of my kind preceptor for the paternal roof, that I was invited to spend some months with a relation of my father's, who resided at a considerable distance. The evening preceding my departure, I went to

bed earlier than usual, because I had to rise with the sun : sleep, however, was not a ready visitant; my imagination was full of the adventures in which I was to be engaged, and I figured to myself an infinite variety of incidents. I expected to find friends in almost every person I encountered, ready to meet with congenial sentiments the ardour with which my heart sprang towards my fellow-creatures. I imagined myself already at the mercy of some beautiful damsel, with sparkling eyes and blooming complexion. I considered how I should act in a variety of interesting situations, and exulted at the prospect before me of plunging among them. Amidst these vagaries of the imagination, I fell asleep, and was roused by Robert, the groom, with the intelligence that it was already past four o'clock. I started from my bed, hurried on my clothes, and, on descending into the parlour, found my kind mother and a good breakfast. After listening to much excellent advice, and many pressing injunctions to take care of myself, and not to ride on the outside of the coach, I at length set out to walk to the neighbouring town, to take my seat in the mail. It was a fine morn-

ing in July: the sun was still near the horizon; the dew was on the grass, the birds were singing, the flowers and foliage were fresh to the eye, and the air was breathing fragrance. The transient feelings of regret at leaving home could not long resist these united charms: my spirits became elevated, my imagination warmed at the scene, and all my anticipations concerning the world which I was going to try, returned with double force. After a journey, in which my spirit of adventure was a little damped by meeting with nothing extraordinary, no incident but of the commonest sort, I arrived at my uncle's, where I spent months of happiness, which still shed their influence on my life. But I must confine my narrative to the promised incident. The few details into which I have already entered, will show you the state of mind in which the urchin Cupid thought proper to attack me.

Amongst other visits which I paid with my uncle, he took me one day to see a friend of his, of the name of Clifford, whose house was situated about half a dozen miles from his own. As we approached, we saw Mr. Clifford walking in the grounds, and joined him, when he imme-

diately accompanied us to the house, that he might present us to his lady. The hall-door being open, we entered without intimation of any kind, and surprised a blooming girl of eighteen, in a simple but graceful *deshabille*. A single exclamation of surprise, addressed to her father, was scarcely uttered, when she disappeared with the rapidity of lightning; but not before she had given us an opportunity of seeing a lovely countenance overspread with blushes. For a moment I was entranced. I had never seen any thing half so lovely: her form possessed all the roundness and symmetry of a woman's, but her face was that of a young girl; her eyes were sparkling, but the spectator was content to dispense with their brilliancy for the fascination of her downcast look. I had often felt admiration of beauty, but never the emotions which I now experienced. During the rest of the visit, I could think of nothing but the lovely vision which I had just seen.

It was only a few evenings after this that I attended a ball, at which I knew Miss C. would be present; and my uncle having introduced me to her, I succeeded in obtaining her hand for the first dances. My feelings were inexpressible:

I felt as if I were in the presence of an angelic being. I gazed continually on her eyes, her neck, her bosom, and yet I felt an unaccountable timidity in speaking to her, and offering her the usual civilities. She was equally timid, quite unaffected, and full of amiable feeling. Her smile was delicious, her blush fascinating; combined, they were irresistible, and it was in combination they were most frequently seen. The opportunities of this evening confirmed the impression which the first glance had made. I was irrecoverably enamoured. But what conduct was I to pursue? I was still a boy, a year or two younger than herself. It was not likely she would receive the addresses of one who was little more than a child in appearance, and who had no prospects of immediate independence. I deeply felt the small chance I had of success, and, more than all, the ridicule to which I should expose myself. Besides, my visit to my uncle was near its termination; in a few days I should be more than a hundred miles from her residence, and there was no probability that I should see her again for several years. All these considerations, united with the timidity natural to my age, prevented me from avowing

the passion with which I was inspired, either to the object of it or to any other person ; but they did not prevent me from gratifying my feelings in various ways. I took a delight in writing her name and giving vent to my attachment on paper ; many a time, during the few days I had still to remain, did I walk past the house of her father, happy to catch a glimpse of her form, or even of the roof which covered her. I secretly determined to return as soon as I became of a proper age, and throw myself at her feet. Yet even this resolution was almost without hope : I could not conceive but that she must be surrounded by innumerable admirers, and I expected to hear of some man of rank and fortune bearing her off as a prize, for which no sacrifice could be too great. I wished myself such a man, and I thought with what eagerness I should make her the offer of my hand and fortune, lest I should be anticipated by any competitor. I was too ignorant of the world to know that men's passions are cooler and more calculating than those of boys.

I recollect, too, another impression which I then had respecting Miss C. I thought so

beautiful a creature contained every thing within herself essential to felicity; I concluded that such loveliness must necessarily be happy, and could feel no uneasiness, no want, no melancholy; the very spot she inhabited must, I thought, be a paradise, in which all was blissful and elegant,—into which neither vice, nor care, nor sorrow could intrude.

The last opportunity I had of seeing this charming girl was in a party at my uncle's, the evening preceding my departure. The weather was wet and winterly, but before seven o'clock a cheerful group had assembled in the drawing-room: we were most of us young, elate with hope, and eager for enjoyment. Amidst so much beauty I could not help feeling happy. The breathing forms of young females, their radiant smiles, their varying complexions, the soft sweet penetrating tones of their voices, the clear ringing of their laughter, their feminine graces and animation, all conspired at that age to intoxicate me with rapture. But the magic of the circle was in Miss C.: I had the good fortune to sit near her, to hand her to the piano, to hear her sing: every word, every motion, every smile, fixed

itself in my memory. But, amidst all my happiness, the thought that it was the last night would often intrude itself. This reflection nevertheless endeared the scene before me only still more to my heart. I felt an emotion similar to that of the wounded and dying Gertrude, in Campbell's beautiful tale, when she is addressing her husband in those pathetic words—

“ Press me a little longer on the brink
Of fate while I can feel thy dear caress.”

I could not help giving way to my admiration and joy, though I felt conscious all was cold and gloomy beyond the present hour. I enjoyed the scene with the desperation of one who is swallowing the last drop of bliss, reckless of consequences. I was in a mood to exclaim, with Basil—

“ Well, there is yet one day of life before me,
And, whatso'er betide, I will enjoy it,
Though but a partial sunshine in my lot.
I will converse with her, gaze on her still,
If all behind were pain and misery.”

This feeling was increased by the contrast which the bright and happy scene presented to the gloom of the night, of which we were

fully sensible as the deepening blast swept round the house, and the fitful showers beat upon the windows.

Alas! what a revolution next morning, when I rose to take my place in the mail! As I descended the staircase into the hall, the sun had not risen, or was under a cloud; the door of the room in which we had spent the preceding evening was open—I looked in—what a contrast to the scene exhibited there a few hours before! the fire was out, the chairs and tables were in disorder, the leaden twilight of morning replaced the warmth and glow of the cheerful hearth and brilliant tapers; the lovely forms had vanished, not a sound was to be heard, the enchantment was gone. It was like looking on the wrong side of a piece of tapestry. I will not tell you that I took out my pocket-book and poured forth my feelings on the occasion in verse, because the truth is, that I can seldom describe my sensations till they are past, but I felt all that the following lines pourtray. They were written a few days after the occurrence, when the agitation of my feelings had subsided sufficiently to allow them to become the objects of description :—

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

The day had closed with cold and rain,
The tempest patter'd on the pane;
Bright through the room the tapers glow'd,
The hearth its cheerful blaze bestow'd;
Rows of young virgins there were seen,
Of graceful shape and blooming mien,
With ringlets o'er their faces playing,
And sparkling eyes at random straying;
And bosoms fair, too fair to view,
As now they rose and now withdrew,
Half seen, half veiled, beneath the dress
That clasp'd their heaving loveliness.
Sweet were the blushes then that cast
Ten thousand beauties as they pass'd,
O'er face and neck of Parian marble,
And sweet the airs we heard them warble;
Sweet were the whispers round the room,
And sweet the lips of rosy bloom
That closed and opened all the while,—
The glowing cheek, the dimpling smile,
The mutual glance of tender feeling,
The nameless raptures o'er us stealing.
No charm the lovely band forsook;
In every motion, every look,
They seem'd like beings born to bless,
And give and feel love's fond caress.
But one, more lovely than the rest,
Smiled soft enchantment through my breast;
A gaze on her cost many a pang,
But pangs that I would not forego,
And still my wounded heart would hang
Enamoured o'er the cause of woe.

That room, alas ! now lonely glares
With cheerless hearth and vacant chairs ;
There female beauty shines no more ;
The empty seats, the untrod floor,
The voiceless harp, the cold grey light—
Gone is the magic of the night !

Never was there a more dejected spiritless creature than I was as I got into the mail. The trunk, which was flung into the boot of the coach, had almost as much life as myself. The very thought of past joys brought tears into my eyes, and I would have given the world to return, were it for only one evening more.

When I got home, I felt for a long time a sort of sickness of heart, an indescribable longing, an apathy to surrounding objects ; my whole soul was in past scenes and pleasures, and it was many months, if not years, before I could think of the incidents here narrated without strong emotions.

At present I can join you in the smile with which you will read what I have now written, and with almost as little concern as if the events had happened to some sighing Corydon or tender Damœtas of pastoral celebrity.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER V.

Effect of increasing Years on our Judgment of Poetry—Goldsmith's celebrated Lines on the slight Influence of Political Misrule on Private Happiness—Examination of his Doctrine on that subject.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU know that I am a great reader of poetry, and have been a still greater. As I grow older, I find passion and sensibility giving way to intellect, the powers of feeling to those of discrimination; and now, instead of suffering myself to be borne passively along by the strain of the minstrel, I am perhaps too apt to stop and analyse its properties. In general, I find the logic of poets not very strict. Their object is to produce an effect, to make an impression; and they consequently accumulate every circumstance which can aid their purpose, and suppress every thing, however true, which would impair the unity or completeness of the emotion which it is their object to raise. To discriminate and weigh, would check the

imagination. Exceptions and limitations, so essential to truth, would be the destruction of sentiment. In this spirit of criticism, I happened lately to take up Goldsmith's Traveller, and I could not help being struck with the wrong impressions which the following passage, beautiful as it is in point of language, seems adapted to produce:—

“ In every government, though terrors reign,
Though tyrant kings or tyrant laws restrain,
How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.
Still to ourselves in every place consigned,
Our own felicity we make or find.
With secret course, which no loud storms annoy,
Glides the smooth current of domestic joy :
The lifted axe, the agonizing wheel,
Luke's iron crown, and Damien's bed of steel,
To men remote from power but rarely known,
Leave reason, faith, and conscience, all our own.”

That all our happiness does not depend on governments, is too plain to be insisted upon ; but that the evils inflicted by bad governments, or by tyrant kings or tyrant laws, form a small item in the sufferings of individuals, is a doctrine to which the friends of liberty cannot assent, without admitting that they are contending for their object with disproportionate

ardour. If a good and free government is valuable, it is valuable because it conduces to national happiness, and since national happiness is made up of the happiness of individuals, it must be valuable because it contributes to the felicity of private life. There is no abstract entity, called a nation, which endures calamity or enjoys good. It would therefore be a contradiction to assert, that there is much difference in value between a good and a bad government, and at the same time that the power which they possess of affecting human hearts with pain and pleasure is of little account. There are, it is true, a number of the evils of tyranny and oppression which appear to fall only on a few individuals, and not to affect those "remote from power." The capricious despot may in the course of his reign put to torture or to death only ten or twenty innocent victims, and when these are considered as part of a population of ten or twenty millions, the evil may appear too slight to be considered as materially trenching on general happiness. "Luke's iron crown and Damien's bed of steel" may fall to the lot of only one or two in an age. The power of a despotic government,

then, if we consider it only when it is exerted intentionally and specifically in extreme acts of tyranny against individuals, may not produce evils of much importance, at least in point of extent or frequency; but to regard the matter in this light, is to look upon a mere angle and not on the whole figure. It was such a confined and partial view which appears to have prompted these celebrated lines of the poet. Let us try for a moment what results will be afforded by a more comprehensive survey.

It is wrong, in the first place, to limit the evils of a tyrannical government to those individuals on whom its tyranny happens to light. Though the victims of its severity might be comparatively few, yet, as they would be selected by wantonness and caprice, or at least without regard to rule, there would be a continual dread and feeling of liability to evil through the whole community, constraining the words and actions of the people, and depriving them of that inestimable blessing, the sense of security in property, happiness, and life. And to live in perpetual alarm and constraint, to be incapable of acting with the fearlessness of

innocence, to tremble at the unforeseen consequences of unavoidable casualties, lest they should be imputed as crimes—all this is surely to have the current of domestic joy deprived of some of its smoothness: all this is surely something more than insignificant for the heart to endure. A man's private felicity, besides, cannot be insulated from that of others; it is necessarily connected with the fate and fortunes of his neighbours. Independently of all dread of a similar catastrophe, the merciless imprisonment or execution of a fellow creature mingles bitterness in the feelings of every heart not callous to humanity.

But although the extreme acts of tyranny directed against individuals were few, the less important would be numerous. A despotic government infuses its spirit into all the ramifications of its power; into all its grand and petty officers; into the whole body of its minions; and the subject is oppressed in numerous ways, however remote he may be from power, and although he may be fortunate enough to escape "the lifted axe and agonizing wheel." There are a thousand species of op-

pression to which he is obliged to submit, a thousand insults and injuries which he dare not resent and avenge.

The evils of an oppressive government rise in magnitude as we proceed from the contemplation of the exercise of tyrannical power, specifically directed against individuals, to the view of those acts which are levelled indiscriminately against the whole community, or against bodies of men, and of course, in effect, against the individuals composing those bodies; and which manifest themselves in wars, taxes, conscriptions, bad laws, political profligacy, and religious persecution. If all these are national, they are also private evils. An evil affecting the happiness of a nation, and not of the individuals composing that nation, is, as I have already remarked, a contradiction. The subject of a bad government is liable to perpetual calamity: he may have his house destroyed by war, his wife and daughters polluted, his sons seized for soldiers, or perhaps his property pillaged by authorized plunderers. The convulsions and vicissitudes incident to warfare may baffle all his prudence, subvert his calculations, ruin his profession, and from a

flourishing condition plunge him into poverty and degradation. Even in a time of peace, his exertions may be paralyzed by excessive taxation; he may be fettered by a thousand unnecessary restraints; he may be robbed of his property by the chicanery of his neighbours, without the means of redress; his conduct may be watched by spies; he may be severely punished for actions really innocent, and even meritorious; he may suffer continual fear and anxiety; he may be forced into subscriptions, and observances, and professions, against his conviction. So far, indeed, from having his conscience "left his own," he may be compelled by violence, or, what is little better, allured by the temptation of worldly ease or advantage, to sacrifice his integrity. His faith may subject him, in a variety of ways, to pains and penalties, insult and mockery. These are things which constitute some of the chief sources of his private troubles, and which may certainly disturb even "the smooth current of domestic joy." If a man, then, under such circumstances, can be said to make his own happiness, he must make it out of the stubborn materials presented to him. It is

true, that he may enhance or diminish the advantages or disadvantages of any situation by the tenor of his conduct; but nothing which he has the power to do, can make all situations equally productive of good. Let him do what he will, let him conduct himself with the greatest discretion, and evince the loftiest virtue—it is impossible for him to evade or resist the assaults on his happiness which such circumstances combine to make. If it be objected, that these are evils which seldom occur, and therefore the position—that the share which governments have in producing human happiness is small—will still hold good, the objection manifestly overlooks the character of the evils which I have enumerated. Many of them affect, more or less, every individual in the state, and constantly mingle with the current of life. Such are the evils of bad laws and oppressive taxation, restrictions and burthens on the exercise of industry, insecurity of property, liberty, and life.

So bound, indeed, is the happiness of the community with the acts of government, that a declaration of war, or the conclusion of a

treaty, or even a legislative enactment, may be felt in its consequences by the meanest artizan in the state. Such a transaction may transform his cottage, the abode of peace and plenty and cheerfulness, into a place of poverty and wretchedness, the inhabitants of which can scarcely obtain sufficient food to keep up a sensibility to their sufferings ; or, on the other hand, it may raise the indigent and miserable to a state of comfort and affluence. Even with regard to those evils which a government only occasionally inflicts, the objection which we are considering is sophistical. One evil, one misfortune, is often sufficient to blast the happiness of a whole life. The loss of intimate friends by death is of comparatively rare occurrence, but it is not therefore to be regarded as a slight calamity among the evils of existence. Though it may happen in a moment, it is sometimes known to embitter the remaining years of the survivor ; and, in like manner, a single act of despotism, or a single mischievous enactment, falling upon an individual, may ruin his happiness beyond repair. When a man's enjoyment in the world is blasted, root

and branch, it is a poor consolation to tell him that he is not likely to become a victim a second time to the same calamity.

But we are to take into account not only the positive evil which a despotic government inflicts, but the good which it prevents ; and here we shall find that it is, if possible, a still greater curse to the human race. To estimate the good which it prevents, we have only to contrast the arts and institutions, and general character of a nation, under a free government, with those of a people who are the slaves of despotic power. In the one case we see a flourishing commerce, a well-cultivated country, an air of comfort and enjoyment among the people, freedom of thought, enterprise, frankness, liberality, courage, integrity, benevolence : in the other, a feeble and sickly trade, forced institutions, narrow ideas, hypocrisy, cunning, the revenge of assassins, and the servility of slaves. If it be true, as Homer says, that the day which makes a man a slave takes away half his virtue, it must also take away half his happiness. If slavery degrades the character of a people, lowers them in the scale of being, diminishes their virtue, and

shackles and impedes their progress in knowledge, what is this (if virtue is any thing but a name, and knowledge of the least use), but saying, that it injures the well-being of every individual composing the nation ?

In regard to the evils of bad government, we have only to listen to the voice of experience. To what are we to ascribe it, that some of the finest countries in the world are overrun with a ruined and miserable population, if not to the baleful operation of despotic power? Greece, beautiful Greece, is herself a lasting evidence of the evils which the few can heap upon the many ; of the degradation of the moral and mental qualities of human nature, under the pestilent influence of uncontrolled domination.

Let us, then, hear no more of the doctrine, that kings and laws can have little influence on private happiness. They have an all-pervading influence. To a very large extent they determine the painful or pleasant emotions, the train of ideas, the health, the social alliances, the professional success—in a word, the destiny of the individual. No one is too high or too low to escape the grasp of their power. They determine even the existence of large numbers

of mankind. Whether a country, for instance, is thinly or densely peopled, may depend almost altogether on the acts of its government. We may rest assured, that in civil affairs, as in every other class of events, if certain causes are in operation, certain results will follow ; and if mankind are supine and careless in regard to their social interests, they must expect to suffer the consequences of bad political arrangements. The doctrine against which I have been contending, evidently tends to relax their attention to evils which could not long exist, if their causes were clearly and generally seen. Poets may be much better employed than in fomenting that negligence or despondency, with respect to improvements in government, to which men are already too prone.

Farewell,

F. R.

LETTER VI.

Feelings of the Sexes towards each other—Conversation at a Dinner-Party on Matrimony—The Bachelor's Lament, a Poem.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have often been struck with the large share which the relative situation of the two sexes has in the feelings, passions, actions, and events of human existence. It is the source of half the interest and pleasure of life. Men and women are a sort of mystery to each other. It is impossible that the two sexes should ever enter into each other's peculiar emotions. Separated by an impassable barrier, stamped by nature with an indelible distinction, they can in many respects as little imagine the nice shades, secret peculiarities, and ineffable circumstances of each other's fears and hopes, pains and pleasures, as the blind can figure to themselves the colours and appearances of visible objects. It is a remark, I think, of the admirable author of the *Plays on the Passions*, that nothing is so much an object of curiosity to man as man

himself. We have always an eager desire to penetrate into the feelings of men placed in situations different from our own, and particularly situations of an extraordinary character. With what interest the bulk of a nation gaze upon their king; with what anxiety they will wait to catch the least glimpse of him as he passes in his carriage; with what eagerness they will listen to the most trivial anecdote respecting him, and to the minutest details of his words and actions! And so it is with any man of eminence or celebrity—with the poet, the orator, or the hero.

It is the same principle of the human constitution which operates to increase the interest which the sexes feel in each other. There is always this curiosity more or less at work. But there is another principle, also, as well as this principle of curiosity, which will account for some of the interest which we take in those who are in different situations from ourselves. When we look upon the hero, who returns victorious from the field, part of our gratification no doubt arises from a wish to penetrate into his emotions, but part also from his presence serving to suggest a thousand elevating asso-

ciations of danger, and courage, and glory, of the peril and pomp of battle.

In the same way, the general interest which the sexes feel in each other is owing, not only to a curiosity which is never appeased, but to all those tender and endearing and stimulating associations which naturally rise up in their minds.

I do not intend, however, to enter into any metaphysical analysis: the foregoing reflections were suggested by an incident of recent occurrence. I was invited, last week, to a dinner party, at the house of a gentleman with whom you are well acquainted, Mr. T. The company consisted of about a dozen ladies and gentlemen, in addition to the family of the host. The half-hour which elapsed before the announcement of dinner, was passed in that unpleasant state of constraint usual on such occasions; and the conversation, till the cloth was drawn, was dull and insipid. At length, one of the company luckily started the subject of matrimony, which, hackneyed as it is, soon brought animation into every countenance and volubility to every tongue. The ladies in particular seemed peculiarly alive to it, and adjusted

themselves in their seats and cleared their voices as if for a long and not a silent sitting. They had all smiles in their faces, or at least that tendency to smile, that sort of relaxation of feature, which is produced by pleasure. I observed, too, a few glances passing between some of the junior guests, which I strongly suspected to be "side-long looks of love," from their being accompanied by a little heightening of colour; and I actually caught one young rogue slyly pressing the hand of a meek and modest-looking girl, who had placed it, no doubt unconsciously, in rather a tempting position near his own. Not to dwell, however, on these unnecessary details, the ladies favoured us with their company over the bottle half an hour at least beyond the accustomed period. When they were gone, observing that my friend Gisborne had not ventured to say much on the subject, I rallied him on his silence. "How is it, Gisborne," I began, "that you did not support the cause of your own corps, the bachelors? Is it not cowardly to dissemble your principles in this manner, especially as you have so literally acted up to them by leading a single life?"

This attack, as I intended, roused my friend from his silence into one of his fits of declamation. “My sentiments on this subject,” he replied, reddening as he spoke, “are well known, but it would be invidious to urge them in the presence of the fair sex : nor do I know that it answers any good purpose,” (here he glanced his eye at two young men, who had been painting the pleasures of matrimony in glowing colours), “to try to dissipate those splendid visions, to destroy those webs of fancy, which are formed by youthful minds ; at least, time, I think, is the only agent that can accomplish it. When they are brought into the situation which they so much admire at a distance, the illusion will vanish—the fair fabric of smiles and blushes, amiable feelings, warm caresses, and tender endearments, will disappear at the touch of experience. The hill which charms us at a distance, by its uniform celestial colour and even surface, discloses, when we are upon it, all its rocks, and caverns, and rugged asperities ; and the vaunted state of matrimony, which shines so lovely to the imagination, will be found disfigured by cares, anxiety, indif-

ference, petulance, gloom, and animosity. In both cases, equally—

“ 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view.”

I myself, I confess, once revelled in all these golden dreams, and it has required years of soberness and reflection to reduce my estimate of the married life to something like rationality. Tint after tint faded from the visionary prospect ; star after star went out from the hemisphere of my imagination, till I at length found myself in the pure daylight of truth. These illusions are, in fact, in the highest degree dangerous, and he who enters into matrimony under their influence can scarcely fail to make a shipwreck of happiness : he will be in the situation of one who, expecting to enter a magnificent saloon, suddenly finds himself in a dark closet. Our great poet, Milton, furnishes us with an eminent example of the difference between the fictions of fancy and the reality of truth. Contrast his glowing description of the felicity of connubial life in the bowers of Eden, with his own actual experience—his quarrels with his wife, and his domestic misery !”

At the conclusion of this harangue he suddenly started up and left the room, saying, that he had an engagement which would occupy him about half an hour, but that he would rejoin the company as soon as he was at liberty. When he was gone, a stranger, who had hitherto taken little share in the conversation, remarked what extremely different views men in the same situation frequently entertained. "It is fortunate for Mr. Gisborne," he continued, "that he can console himself, in his state of 'single blessedness,' by reflecting on the miseries he had escaped. I hope he is sincere, although I half suspect he imposes on his own mind, and accustoms himself to declaim against matrimony, to banish his regret at having missed, irrecoverably missed, some of the sweetest pleasures of life. This is the feeling, at least, which I think I have remarked in most old bachelors: it is pretty strongly expressed in some verses which I will do myself the pleasure of reading to you; but I must first give you an account of the singular way in which they came into my hands. Walking a few days ago in the streets of the neighbouring town, I saw before me a well-dressed middle-aged gen-

tleman, going along at a very brisk pace. A sudden jerk, in drawing out his handkerchief, threw from his pocket, unperceived by himself, a paper, folded in the form of a letter. On reaching the spot, I took it up and endeavoured to overtake him ; but much to the relief of my curiosity he turned suddenly down a narrow and winding alley, and disappeared, I could not tell how. I say, much to the relief of my curiosity, for that alert prompter had been inciting me to read the paper while the owner was yet in sight, and was almost in an agony of hopelessness when I appeared to gain upon the object of my pursuit ; as soon, therefore, as he had vanished, my delicacy yielded to its more powerful antagonist, and I ventured to open the paper, allaying all scruples by the just reflection that it was the only way of finding out to whom it belonged :—

“ Ye prudes in virtue, say,
Say, ye severest, what would ye have done ?”

On opening the sheet I found it contained the following verses, but without any signature, or mark, or indication by which I might discover the writer. The poem is entitled—

THE BACHELOR'S LAMENT.

Age comes, I see his grim array,—
Days of my youth, of love, farewell !
Life's varied colours turn to gray,
Life's music sinks into a knell.

Yet mourn I not with youth to part,
But mourn that, fleeing, she has left
No ties to cheer my lonely heart,
Of all her smiling dreams bereft.

Think not that heart has never felt
The radiant force of beauty's eye ;
Nor known the flame that all can melt,
Nor labour'd with a lover's sigh.

Fair was the maid that taught it first
To glow with love's mysterious light,
When opening scenes of pleasure burst
On youthful passion's eager sight.

Her timid glance was downward thrown,
Her bosom heaved beneath its vest ;
From lips of love came love's true tone,
A blush—it would not be repress'd.

Away, ye visions of my prime !
Your bright illusions wake despair ;
And yet, to flee the present time,
Still would my fancy revel there.

In hopeless mood to wake at morn,
To eat the solitary meal ;
To wander, to return forlorn,
To feel the void none else can feel :

To list the clock, to count the hours,
 To watch the embers all alone ;
 To feel that time saps all my powers,
 Yet leads no infant likeness on—

No prattling babe to run and smile,
 With cherub lip and liquid eye ;
 And little hands outspread the while,
 Looks upward turn'd and joyful cry—

Such is my doom : no children's charms,
 No father's feelings—worse than this,
 No gentle creature fills my arms,
 The soul and centre of my bliss.

Her, who imparts its finest tone
 To life, and only lives for you ;
 Who twines her being round your own—
 That lovely thing I never knew.

The married pair feel many a woe,
 And fate their dearest ties may sever ;
 But, ah ! the pain they cannot know
 Of joys like theirs thus lost for ever !

After the gentleman had read these verses, I requested permission to view the hand-writing, which I recognized immediately as that of my friend, Gisborne. While I was mentioning the discovery, Gisborne himself entered the room ; I immediately put the verses into his hand—he reddened—there was a general burst of laughter. He bit his lips, tried to

force a smile, and to put on a cavalier air. "Gentlemen," says he, "you make yourselves very merry,—I am glad of it; the verses are undoubtedly mine, although I cannot conceive how you got hold of them: but you forget that the essence of poetry is fiction. The truth is, that in the impartiality of my nature, I was trying, a few days ago, to find out if anything really could be urged in favour of 'the holy state;' and, perceiving that the considerations on this side of the question were too bare to be exhibited in plain prose, I had recourse to verse, as admitting that degree of exaggeration, of colouring, and heightening, of which they stood in so much need."

Perhaps this was extricating himself from his 'false position' with as good a grace as the affair admitted; and our silence (for we immediately let the subject drop) allowed him to imagine he had succeeded in convincing us that the poem was a mere frolic of fancy.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER VII.

Recollections of Holydays at School—Rustic Parties of Pleasure—Account of an Excursion to visit the Ruins of an old Castle.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You will recollect the joyous holydays we used to have when you and I were at school together ; the days when we visited some romantic spot half a dozen miles distant ; the pleasure of anticipation the day before, and the bustle of preparation in the morning. In what wild ecstasy we rambled over the fields as we were going, plucking flowers, and trying, with scientific ambition, to recollect their botanical names ; or jumping over hedges and gates, by way of showing our agility, till at length we arrived at the place of destination, exhausted and weary in limb, but with appetites more vigorous than ever. It was no des-

picable pleasure we then enjoyed, stretched on the grass,

“ Prostrati in gramine molli,
Propter aquæ rivum, sub ramis arboris altæ ;”

and partaking of that homely refreshment which we had brought along with us, or procured from some neighbouring cottage. But perhaps the most deeply felt pleasure of these excursions was on our return home about sunset. As we walked along, linked arm in arm, our conversation grew more interesting, and our thoughts more concentrated, while the shades of coming night deepened around us. We would listen with almost breathless interest to some one of the party who was narrating the exploits of banditti, or the appearance of a spectre. There was something in the thickening twilight which elevated our thoughts, and produced a feeling of solemnity combined with pleasure ; a frame of mind partly perhaps the result of a day spent contrary to our usual routine, in innocent amusements, and with spirits raised above the ordinary pitch. We talked, too, of our future prospects ; how we, who now formed a band of brothers, should hereafter be cast asunder on the wide world,

and engaged in different pursuits, perhaps in different climes. We formed conjectures as to what life was, as to the occupations and enjoyments of men; and while imagination gladdened at the prospect, there was a feeling of melancholy at the thought of resigning the friends who were now the dearest to our hearts. We talked, too, of the secrets of the grave; of the fate of human beings in a future world; of the companions who had been snatched from us by death, in the bloom of health, and the height of enjoyment; and an undefined apprehension that we might soon be called to a similar doom would mingle a sentiment of awe with our boyish reflections.

In looking back upon my life, I find few days, on the whole, happier than these; and it is perhaps the pleasant associations I have with them which, partly at least, occasion me to prefer, even now, an excursion with a few friends into the country, to almost any other amusement. I know not whether you are acquainted with the way in which we rustics conduct parties of this kind. They resemble in a great measure the boyish expeditions which I have just brought to your mind; but

differ, of course, inasmuch as the persons engaged in them are men and women, and there are consequently feelings alive on these occasions which had no place in our youthful rambles.

A few days ago, I was invited to join a party of this kind. The time fixed for setting out was nine in the morning, and I arrived at the place of rendezvous, which was the house of the projector of the excursion, about ten minutes after. None of the company, however, had yet assembled, but they gradually dropped in, one after the other, with smiling faces, and looks elate with hope. We who first arrived amused ourselves with watching the different parties as they came in, wondering who would come, and who would fail, exclaiming with eagerness that we saw such a one approaching, and congratulating the new comers, as soon as they got within arm's length, by a hearty grasp of the hand.

At length we all took the field, and a motley company we made. First were four ladies, and half as many sedate gentlemen, in a sort of rustic car, drawn by two horses; next, a couple of gigs, each containing a young gal-

lant, with a modest damsel at his side. The rest, consisting of five or six pretty maidens, and more than an equal number of spruce cavaliers, were on horseback, some mounted pretty well, and some on ponies, of various tempers, sizes, and velocities, with saddles and bridles rubbed up for the occasion from a six months' rust.

Off we set, however, with great glee, which seemed to infuse itself into our horses, till at length some of the ladies were obliged to beg us not to ride so fast. One in particular, who had just been giving us an insight into her own opinion of her equestrian skill, which seemed to be pretty high, was pale with affright, and was at last obliged to declare she could not hold in her palfrey. With a few jokes on the occasion, we slackened our pace, and gave ourselves time to admire the beautiful country upon which we had now entered. It was a delicious valley, watered by a rivulet, and enclosed by pretty lofty hills, covered with wood. On each side the road were well-cultivated farms, and occasionally the mansion and park of some opulent family diversified the succession of farm-houses and rural cot-

tages. I could now perceive a variety of manœuvres in several of the party to get by the side of the ladies they most admired ; and, on the part of the ladies, sundry little stoppages and delays, to adjust bonnets and arrange habits, which seemed not at all intended to thwart any designs of this nature. At the conclusion of a pleasant ride of a dozen miles, we alighted at the place of our destination, and, after resting a little while at a rustic inn, we proceeded on foot to the ruins of an ancient hall or castle, the object of our visit. Here we spent several hours, wandering among the ruins, climbing to the towers, or reposing on the grass. We had a number of delightful little accidents and occasions of merriment, almost too volatile to be compressed into narration. One or two of our young gallants met with harmless and laughable falls, in attempting to show off their activity and prowess. Sometimes a gown or a petticoat was caught by an ivy bush, and exposed the recluse beauties of an ankle, between which and the face of the owner there seemed to be an intimate connexion, if we might judge from the sudden suffusion of the one at the exposure of the other. At other

times we had to support our fair companions up broken and winding staircases, where it became requisite, or at least compatible with perfect decorum, to venture on a juxta-position of arms and waists not otherwise permissible ; on which occasions I suspect many a furtive caress did its best to wear the semblance of necessary aid. Now the ladies would become dizzy with looking from the top of a turret, and cling to our arms with timid confidence ; and now they would slyly attempt to shut up some of their male cousins in the dark cells or closets, although they were aware that the discovery of the trick would lead to a pursuit, which might possibly end in the infliction—of what perhaps would be no punishment.

At length we began to grow weary, and to feel a want of refreshment. There was a general cry for dinner, the charms of which seemed to rise before the imagination with mighty power. A cloth was quickly spread on the grass, a basket was produced, and we were soon seated in a ring, as merry a group as ever assembled at the most sumptuous table. We laughed heartily at some of the expedients to which we were obliged to resort. Fingers were

never brought in closer contact with viands since the days of Adam and Eve, when knives and forks were still an invention in the womb of time; and a single rustic mug was doomed (enviable destiny!) to run the gauntlet of all the pretty lips in the circle. The interstices of the repast (if you will allow me a rather odd expression) were well filled by a number of jokes, some wretched enough, to be sure, but all welcome to those for whose ears they were intended. Quirks and quibbles, catches and misapprehensions, puns and perversions of meaning, all served the purpose. We were fastidious neither as to what we eat, nor what we laughed at.

After thus refreshing ourselves, we were again ready for adventure, and sallied forth to explore the neighbouring church. We loitered some time on the rustic graves, reading the rude and homely inscriptions; and if a passing thought of what we in our turn were destined to become, crossed our minds, it only endeared the present pleasure the more. We then penetrated into the church itself, scrutinizing all its parts. While one of the fair damsels lingered at the altar, in a reverie in which I suspect some future scene was filling her imagination,

another irreverent girl absolutely intruded into the pulpit itself, whence she showered down upon us, if not goodly advice, at least a profusion of smiles and glances, which penetrated quite as deep, and produced quite as strong an effect. We did not, I am afraid, treat the place with all the reverence due to it ; although, as we left it, and saw the evening sun streaming through the windows upon the graves of the departed, and upon some ancient figures,

“ With hands uplifted on the breast,
In attitude of prayer,”

I, for my own part, could not resist a feeling of deep solemnity, which was increased by the hollow sound of our footsteps as we paced along the aisle. I did not fail to notice the 'squire's pew, so admirably described in the little poem from which I have just taken the two lines last quoted. The actual scene was before me :—

“ A slanting ray of evening light
Shoots through the yellow pane ;
It makes the faded crimson bright,
And gilds the fringe again :
The window's gothic frame-work falls
In oblique shadows on the walls.

“ And since those trappings first were new,
How many a cloudless day,
To rob the velvet of its hue,
Has come and pass’d away !
How many a setting sun hath made
That curious lattice-work of shade !” *

It was now growing late, and the lengthening shadows of evening warned us that we should have to ride home in the dark unless we hastened our departure. Again mounting our palfreys, we set out on our return at a soberer pace than we came, gratified with the pleasure of the day, and thrown into that quiet mood which often succeeds the vivacity of mirth, and is so much in harmony with the serenity of summer twilight. Our road lay partly over a wild and desolate moor, the fresh and fragrant atmosphere of which was grateful to our senses, while its deep solitude, rendered still deeper by the lateness of the hour, enhanced the prevailing tone of our minds into an indescribable feeling of mingled exhilaration and solemnity. We naturally fell into silent rumination ; even the most

* Essays in Rhyme, by Jane Taylor.

vivacious of our company lost for a while their habitual talkativeness, and an occasional remark in an undertone was all that was heard. I suffered the party to pass me, and for about half an hour indulged in the feelings and fancies which in such a scene and at such a time irresistibly crowd on the mind.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER VIII.

Unchangeableness of the Radical Properties of Character—Use of this Truth in the Selection of Agents and Occupations; in our Intercourse with Society; and in entering into important Engagements—Adventitious Motives unable to contend in the long run with permanent Principles of Action.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

An essay which lately fell in my way advanced the position that the characters of men never change their radical properties, but ended by declaring, that no useful inference could be derived from the doctrine. The position itself I have had abundant occasion to verify, and far from thinking it incapable of practical application, I scarcely know any which is susceptible of more. Our business, our studies, our pleasures, are all promoted or impeded by the tempers, the passions, the principles, the tastes of our fellow men. What effects we can produce upon these their mental qualities, to what purposes we can render them subser-

vient, and what consequences we may rationally anticipate from them, it is of the highest importance for us to ascertain; and it assuredly must make a wide difference in our conclusions, whether we proceed on the principle here stated, or speculate on the possibility of a radical change of human character. It is in the practical adoption of the latter opinion, I think, that most people err. They often imagine, for instance, that they can do wonders by reasoning and advice; they point out to a man the errors of his conduct, show him the line he ought to pursue, and urge him, by various motives, to follow it; and from the professions of reformation which the strong temporary impression upon his mind elicits, and which may be perfectly sincere, they hope to find him in future a model of correctness. But let them not rely upon his perseverance in a course of action opposed to the fundamental properties of his character. Although striking events, or powerful appeals to his reason and his feelings, may deeply affect his mind and alter his conduct, the impression cannot last: he may do much to restrain and conceal, but

he will inevitably relapse, secretly or openly, into his former self.

Hence, when we have to employ our fellow-creatures in any office, we should in general act more wisely were we to choose those who possess qualities adapted to it, than were we to attempt to bend unsuitable qualities to our purposes, by the force of motives applied for the occasion. Such motives are gradually exhausted of their strength in their conflict with the complexional properties of the individual; they require frequent renewal, a perpetual renovation, while their antagonists have an even steady vigour, self-perpetuated and never relaxing. It is the variable efforts of Sisyphus against the constant, all-pervading, immutable power of gravitation.

In this way a man may speculate upon his own character, and ascertain how he will conduct himself in any given circumstances. He who is constitutionally timid, ought not to calculate that any position of affairs can permanently inspire him with boldness. He should never embark, therefore, in any enterprise which would require the continual exer-

cise of that quality. A man of indolence, fond of ease, destitute of spirit and energy, should never place himself in a situation which will make perpetual demands for activity and decision. It is the part of the wise man to avoid taking upon himself offices for which he feels conscious he is unfit; because they are sure to bring him mortification of spirit, if not open disgrace. He may, by a little address, conceal the weak parts of his character, or at least avoid giving them unnecessary prominence and publicity. He will calculate upon his own mental qualities as the instruments with which he has to act, just as he would calculate upon the strength of a piece of timber or the power of a horse; and he will not attempt what his instruments are unfit to accomplish. "Confine your pretensions within the circle of your means," was the sage remark of Necker, "and you will then be above the reach of humiliation."

We cannot make our qualities of either body or mind what we would. We must take them as they are, and extract from them all the good which they are capable of yielding. It is wisdom to acquiesce in the decree of Nature, for

attempts to set it aside will only expose our frailties.

In my own intercourse with society, I have found this doctrine of considerable use. For instance, I have a very worthy friend, a man of sense and honour, yet, from a certain peculiarity of constitution, incapable of retaining a secret. When I first became intimate with him, I was surprised at the speedy promulgation of some circumstances which I had imparted to none but himself. I reproached him with this breach of confidence, and exerted all my rhetoric to make him sensible of the mischief which, in our relative situation to each other, such disclosures would inevitably create. He regretted his indiscretion,—it was weak, it was foolish; he was fully aware of its pernicious consequences, and the future should find him a paragon of secrecy.

All, however, was in vain. The most pressing injunctions were soon forgotten: they might seal up his mind for a few days, but his circumspection was sure to relent ere long in the warmth of social discourse. The proneness to impart was too radical a property of the man to be restrained by the shackles which

my remonstrances had thrown around it, and which lost strength every hour. I at last gave the matter up as irremediable, and I now calculate upon this property of my friend's character in much the same way as I expect snow to melt in the sun, or wood to burn in the fire.

Some use might be made of this doctrine by aspirants after the holy state of wedlock. When people are married, the change in their circumstances is so great, that they sometimes flatter themselves with the expectation of a wonderful transformation of character, both in themselves and in those with whom they have paired. The man, perhaps, fancies that however ill-tempered he has hitherto shown himself, he can never be out of humour with the charming creature who has trusted her happiness into his hands, and she is equally flattered by the hope that her influence will diffuse perpetual sunshine through his disposition ; and, as it regards herself, that although she had been but an indifferent daughter, nobody will surpass her as an excellent wife. In short, a complete conversion of all unpleasant qualities is to be accomplished, and clouds and tempests are to be kept at an eter-

nal distance. When the intoxication of passion, however, is over, when the transient motives for restraint and concealment are gone, both characters will re-appear in their true colours, with little modification and little improvement. Some habits, it is true, may be changed, but the general qualities will remain, to disturb and embitter, or, on the other hand, to soothe and sweeten domestic life.

The doctrine here insisted upon will, I am aware, be stigmatized as disheartening, and tending to discourage all attempts at moral improvement. To this it would be a sufficient reply that the doctrine is true, since what is true in the science of human nature must, on the whole, be productive of advantage ; and it cannot lessen the happiness of mankind to prevent them from cherishing false hopes and embarking in fruitless enterprises. But it is not necessary to resort to this abstract kind of answer. All that is requisite is to guard the doctrine from misconception, by bringing into distinct view the limitation which is implied by the phrase, *radical* properties of character. There is a difficulty, indeed, in defining what

these are, in contra-distinguishing them from such as are adventitious, but this is a difficulty which belongs rather to speculation than to practice. It does not require any extraordinary sagacity to discover, in men with whom we are intimately acquainted, those radical or constitutional qualities which seem to make up their very individuality, and which they are destined to carry with them to the grave.

While in these radical properties we can expect little or no change, there is still a wide field for moral improvement in the adventitious principles of action. Habits may at all times be altered, and it is to these chiefly that the moralist applies his *manus emendatrix*; it is here that he looks for his proudest triumphs.

Men, in a word, are like metals which possess properties capable of being in some degree modified, but which always retain certain distinctive characteristics. We may throw a piece of silver into the form of a sword, but we cannot superinduce upon it the peculiar hardness or lustre of steel. And so we may train a timid man in the habits of a soldier, and teach him to face a battery or storm a

citadel, but it is impossible to infuse into him that uncalculating boldness which seeks danger as its natural element and sports with death.

The same doctrine is true of human nature in general, as well as of individual character. Enterprises often fail from an inattention to the truth, that although a strong motive may impel mankind to act for a short time contrary to their usual course, yet it is not able to contend in the long run with their permanent principles of action. Thus, projects commenced with spirit and ardour are abandoned when the first impulse has ceased. New institutions are supported with vigour, but gradually lapse into neglect and decay, as all institutions will inevitably do which depend for their success on extraordinary fervour and enthusiasm, and have not a basis in the common and continually recurring motives of the human mind ; and it is curious to remark how soon the best institutions are perverted when these constant motives are acting in opposition to those of a more fugitive, although, while they last, of a more vigorous character. This has been largely exemplified in the mal-

administration of charitable funds. The never closing eye of self-interest is continually on the watch for opportunities of gainful appropriation, while the vigilance which guards the treasure is the transitory effort of a mind prompted by occasional incitement. It is easy to see what must be the result.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER IX.

The Fate of Female Beauty—General Homage and Flattery in Youth—Brilliant Hopes and Prospects—Change in after-life.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A few days ago I unexpectedly met with a lady whom I dare say you recollect under the name of Sophia D—— as one of the most beautiful girls you ever saw. What a change in a few years! I was thunder-struck to recognise, in the coarse, insipid, corpulent Mrs. B——, the same being who at eighteen had fascinated every eye that gazed upon her by the graceful slenderness of her form, the delicate bloom of her complexion, and the sprightliness of her looks.

On inquiring into her history since I had lost sight of her, I found it a very commonplace one. After coquetting with a young man who was deeply smitten with her charms, but who had little to recommend him except

talents and virtues which have since raised him to distinction then little anticipated, she bestowed her hand on a suitor of more fashionable pretensions. They have had no children, and the husband, having lost that gaiety and good-humour which were the effects of youthful vigour, has sunk into a supine and morose country gentleman; and she has become—what I saw her, without any attractions of mind or manners to compensate for the flight of bloom and beauty.

I have often been forcibly struck when circumstances of this kind have led me to contemplate the destiny of a beautiful woman, so bright, so exhilarating, so full of promise and hope and joy at its commencement—often so melancholy at its close. She is a being, while young, so naturally attractive, so universally fascinating, the homage paid to her is so general among all ages and ranks, that she would be more than mortal if she resisted the reflected influence of her own charms; if she did not come to regard herself as of more real importance in the universe than any individual can possibly be; if she did not overlook that the highest, the most eminent human being,

whether for rank, talents, or personal fascination, occupies a very small portion of other people's attention, an insignificant share of their mental panorama; and that the annihilation of such a one would scarcely be felt, except by a few, after the first minute; that the gap left would speedily be filled; that it would be one of those wounds on the surface of society which would almost instantly heal.

A beautiful female, almost on emerging from infancy, begins to perceive that there is something attractive about her; she cannot avoid noticing that her presence gives pleasure: there is even then a sort of competition for her favour, and the caresses she receives are so many proofs of her growing influence. Verging on womanhood, new feelings spring up in her mind. A thousand indefinite visions of love and joy float before her imagination. She finds that she is become the object of a new species of attention; the flattery of looks and smiles and words every where awaits her. She perceives the austerity of age, the dignity of rank, and the pride of intellect, soften in her presence. Love begins to whisper his blandishments in her ear. She is made to believe her-

self the arbitress of men's happiness and misery—that woe waits upon her frown, and joy kindles with her smile. In the imaginations of the young lovers who throng around her, she lies down on her couch at night as a blooming wreath of flowers, all loveliness and fragrance, the pride of nature, the summary of perfection; and she rises in the morning fresh as the rose bathed in dew, and lustrous as the sky. To them she is a living form of beauty, in which happiness and love have taken up their residence. They passionately express what they passionately feel, till she begins herself to mistake the illusion of their minds for truth, and although the infirmities of nature will sometimes remind her that she is frail and mortal, and not all that she is told of herself, yet this is soon forgotten in the flush of health and the triumph of her charms. Thus loved, caressed, and flattered, she lives on in a dream of exultation, which for a time every thing conspires to support. The illusion rises still higher when she is on the eve of uniting her fate to that of the man who has won her heart. What visions of joy, what anticipations of rapture, stream upon her mind! What a per-

spective of eternal love and interminable happiness opens to her view ! No shadow stains the boundless landscape of felicity on which her hopes pour their sunshine.

From dreams like these, however, it is the inevitable doom of mortality to awake. The first sensations in the process are vague and undefined. Surprise, suspicions, misgivings, uncertainty,—these follow each other in her mind, till the truth manifests itself too clearly to be misunderstood. However happily she may be united, she finds that she is united to a human being, a creature of imperfections, subject to physical and mental vicissitude ; and, what is a still greater discovery, she finds that she herself is human, that beauty has not a permanent and paramount influence, that her mind necessarily sinks to its place, generally a subordinate place in its encounter with her husband's, and that, between the familiarity of daily intercourse and the devoted gallantry which hope had made perpetual, there is no compatibility. She begins to perceive that life in any state is not a romance, but a plain everyday concern, demanding vulgar cares, homely duties, common actions ; presenting, too, con-

tinual occasions for differences of sentiment and collisions of humour, which prudence and good sense can alone prevent from being matured into sullenness and petulance and dislike.

Abroad she discovers that she is become an object of comparative indifference. She no longer excites the same interest amongst the other sex as when she was "an unappropriated sweet," and when every one, without any distinct views, might still have his imagination gratified by an indefinite notion of the possibility of her becoming his. Her empire becomes suddenly contracted, and even the few subjects she has left are constantly disposed to fall off from their allegiance. Her beauty also loses its freshness and attraction, or perhaps fades altogether, from sorrow or sickness, or the cares of a family; and thus, in one way or other, the illusion which has involved her completely vanishes, and she sinks to that point of estimation and regard amongst her fellow mortals, to which her permanent qualities entitle her.

This revolution in the fate of a beautiful female is sometimes strikingly rapid, and as

the mind has been weakened by adulation and deceit, as well as prevented from acquiring resources against solitude and neglect, it leaves its subject a melancholy creature. Accustomed to banquet on nectar and ambrosia, the common fare of life becomes insipid. She grows peevish and discontented ; presenting the miserable sight of a queen without an empire, a goddess whose altars are deserted.

Happy are they who in these circumstances can be brought to enter into new combinations of feeling, and learn to enjoy the pleasures derived from an intercourse of rational tenderness and esteem—from a sedulous discharge of the peculiar duties which every stage of life brings with it, and from that perennial source of satisfaction which is found in promoting the happiness of others. Happy too, who have a refuge in the elegant pursuits of literature, or the severer ones of science; and surely, if there is any correctness in the picture here traced, we are furnished with no weak argument for the cultivation of the female mind, which in the first instance has a tendency to prevent delusion, in the next place to counteract the effects, or fill the vacuity which it leaves.

Man is placed in a different situation : his influence and eminence must depend in every stage of life on mental qualities, and, instead of being contracted, they are increased by years. L——, who was rejected by the lady whose story has led to these remarks, is now a conspicuous actor on the stage of public life, with a rapidly increasing fortune, a high character for talents and integrity, and a proportional influence on all around him. There are men, to be sure, who having been indebted for all their pleasures and distinctions in youth to animal vigour alone, are left in their advanced life destitute of resources, stripped of all influence and consideration in society, and sunk into as pitiable a condition as any of those unfortunate beauties who have survived their own charms without having acquired any valuable qualities to replace them. But still there is a wide difference between the destiny of the sexes, greatly in favour of the stronger.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER X.

Visit to the Seaside—First Sight of the Sea in Youth—Impressions produced by a View of this sublime object—Walks on the Beach—Excursions on the Water—Utility of relaxing from Business and Study.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Although I have not written to you lately, I have not been idle, nor forgetful of my literary project. My silence has been owing to an excursion to the shores of the German Ocean, where I have gathered a few materials, shells, and pebbles, of speculation, if you choose to term them so ; which, if they possess little intrinsic value, may yet please for a moment, and cannot prove cumbrous from their weight.

I could gaze upon the sea for ever. It is one of the most interesting objects in nature, perpetually in motion, always presenting some new aspect, appearing as if instinct with life.

I shall never forget the day when my eyes were fixed upon it for the first time, when my ears first heard its awful roar. The first sight of it forms one of those epochs in the life of a contemplative man, which stand for ever prominent in his recollection. It was in the blush of manhood, the poetical season of life, when we are looking forward with mingled curiosity and hope, and novel ideas and feelings are thronging upon the mind. I had longed to see the ocean—vehemently longed—and at last my wishes were gratified. It was a fine morning in summer when I arrived within a mile of the sea. Even at that distance I could hear its roar. Though the sun shone brilliantly, there was a high wind blowing towards the land. The first glimpse I caught of the magnificent object of my visit, was from a rising ground about half a mile from the beach. From that position it had somewhat the appearance of a dark barren moor, “immeasurably spread.” I hastened forward, and almost immediately a long line of white foaming breakers appeared bursting upon the shore, as if they would overwhelm every thing in their course. On reaching the sands, I was awfully delighted with the

scene. For miles on either hand there appeared to be nothing but a wild tumult of foaming waves. I watched them coming from a distance, and at last leaping with a sudden bound to the shore, like lions springing on their prey. They would burst in the middle and gradually extend their foaming torrents on both sides, till they formed long cataracts, breasting the beach, and dying away only to give place to others of equal power and extent. I could not help an odd impression, that the ocean was an immense animal—a living being of mighty power, in whose presence I felt a sensation of deep awe, mixed with an occasional undefined feeling of personal insecurity. After sunset, when I again visited the shore, this emotion became still deeper. I walked about in all the romance of youth, with the ardent enthusiastic feelings natural to my age, repeating those fine lines of Beattie's :—

“Thence, musing onward to the sounding shore,
The lone enthusiast oft would take his way,
Listening with pleasing dread to the deep roar
Of the wide weltering waves.”

The impression of vast power, as we gaze

upon the sea, and the perpetual mutability of its aspect, are, perhaps, the two chief sources of the immediate interest which it excites in every mind of common sensibility. But the effect is aided and prolonged by the immense number and variety of associations connected with it. It is the highway of nations, the medium of communication between distant countries, the scene of daring adventures, of brilliant achievements, of awfully interesting accidents ; it carries the mind to regions which rouse the curiosity of the most listless, to the burning climes of the tropics, to the icy wonders of the poles ; it is itself the element of one grand division of living beings ; myriads of animals lurk beneath its surface, and prowl through its vast extent. But after the poetry which has been lavished upon it, the description of the sea should scarcely be attempted in prose :—

“ O, thou vast ocean ! ever-sounding sea !
Thou symbol of a drear immensity !
Thou thing that windest round the solid world
Like a huge animal, which, downward hurl'd
From the black clouds, lies weltering and alone,
Lashing and writhing till its strength be gone.

Thy voice is like the thunder, and thy sleep
 Is as a giant's slumber, loud and deep.
 Thou speakest in the east and in the west
 At once, and on thy heavily laden breast
 Fleets come and go, and shapes that have no life
 Or motion yet are moved and meet in strife."

But I refer you to Marcian Colonna for the sequel of this apostrophe, lest I should be accused of book-making by quotation. The passage is a powerful one, although a critic might detect some incongruities. When I read it, I was strongly reminded of my own emotions on the occasion to which I have already adverted, and pleased to find a coincidence of impressions.

The emotions with which I now regard the sea, are of a much sedater cast than those which I have attempted to describe. I now look upon it in a sort of dreaming mood: it serves as a gentle stimulus to the mental powers—supplies *pabulum* to the imagination—suggests images—agreeably modifies the train of thought in my mind. I can heartily adopt the exclamation of Pliny—"O mare, o littus, verum secretumque *μουσείον*! quam multa invenitis, quam multa dictatis!" I am interested, too, in the alternate advances and retro-

cessions of the waves, in seeing them break and die away at my feet, and even in the pebbles of different hues which sparkle in the water. As I gaze upon it I am reminded of the hours and days I have passed on its surface, the storms I have encountered, and the nights I have lain awake amidst the rushing of the water close to my ear, the roaring of the wind in the cordage, and the creaking of the timber. Nor am I insensible to its physical beauty, its picturesque appearances. To me it is far more beautiful at sunset, or the moment after. There is something inexpressibly soft and soothing in the aspect of the ocean gently heaving, in the mild radiance of a clear sky, which the sun has just forsaken. How often at this hour have I wandered on the beach, sometimes alone, sometimes in company,—perhaps with a gentle and fair friend, whose looks and voice have been in perfect unison with the scene!

There are many who prefer a moonlight view of the sea to any other. It is, no doubt, extremely interesting, but not, to my taste, by any means equal to the one which I have just

when we came up to it, proved a very common stone. Presents were reciprocally made, which turned out valueless as soon as they were laid on the palm extended to receive them; and a hundred other good-natured tricks were played off, to be enjoyed only by a heart which really knows how to trifle, which really understands—

“ Desipere in loco.”

Our excursions on the water were not the least of our amusements. There is something, after all, extremely interesting to men in female fears, in the timidity which requires encouragement, and prompts the possessor to rely on a stronger mind. This we often experienced as we rowed along and receded from the shore. I do not mean those affected terrors which some display, at once unnatural and vociferous, and the affectation of which is immediately apparent, but the silent and scarcely observable fearfulness, which shrinks inwardly from danger, and looks up for comfort and assurance of safety to the countenance and expres-

sions of less susceptible beings. We generally set out on these excursions very gaily :—

“ Youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm.”

A song would be called for, and we glided along in a sort of pleasurable dream, lulled by the melody of the singer and the motion of the boat. But, alas ! the scene was sometimes suddenly changed :—

“ Oh, mortal pleasure, what art thou in truth ?
The torrent's smoothness ere it dash below.”

No sooner had we pushed our bark amongst rougher waves, than our fair companions began to droop and hang their heads, like pale and lovely lilies. Our inquiries whether they were indisposed, were, at the outset, generally answered by a faint denial, accompanied by a languid smile ; but it would not do—concealment was impossible, and could not long “ feed on the damask cheek.” We were, therefore, obliged to make for shore, and our drooping flowers became erect as soon as they touched their mother earth.

Happy days ! these are some of the sunny spots of life, and I hope they may still recur,

at intervals, amidst the insipidity of common existence.

While on this excursion, I almost shut up my books. I determined to have a complete relaxation from all business and all study, to become intellectually idle, purposely and deliberately unthinking ; and almost succeeded. In my ordinary habits and employments I feel myself in some degree singular and solitary in the world ; but, on this occasion, when it was my endeavour to engage in pursuits for which the preliminary requisite was the dismissal of all thought, I found abundance of companions.

It appears to me that occasionally—once or twice a year, perhaps—this is a most salutary process, and I can assure you, that since my return, I have felt an invigoration of intellect and elasticity of spirit to which I had been long unaccustomed. My old pursuits and objects of attention have acquired, from this brief but complete interruption, an air of novelty and interest. At first, indeed, on my return home, I felt a little depression of spirits—a regret at parting from several agreeable acquaintance—a disposition to dwell on

the scenes I had left, in preference to the actual objects before me—a sort of longing for the indolent life I had been leading; but this mood of the mind soon wore off, and was succeeded by a tone of vigour and vivacity, which, I hope, will be more permanent.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XI.

Apathy to the usual Pursuits and Pleasures of Life—Character of Rodney—Description of the State and Progress of his Feelings—Too keen an Insight into the Illusions of the World not favourable to Happiness—Contrast of a Man of Enthusiastic Temperament.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In the course of your life you have, I dare say, come in contact with characters who seem to be devoid of interest in the affairs of the world; destitute of passion; dead to the animating pursuits of business or ambition; and possessing a remarkable propensity to divest objects of the colours which are thrown around them by ordinary imaginations.

Such a man is my neighbour Rodney, whom I have lately had the good fortune to add to my catalogue of friends. A few days ago we were together at a convivial entertainment. I had several times met with him in society, and had at once felt that I was in the presence of a man

of no common mind. In conversation he was not loquacious, but he talked well: what he said was expressed with singular clearness, and he succeeded in placing the understandings of his hearers precisely on the eminence from which he himself was viewing the subject. The conversation of our convivial party was far from being of an intellectual character: it was a mixture of the worldly and the sensual, and Rodney had scarcely opened his lips. Late in the evening he and myself quitted the house together. "What a farce is life and all its pleasures," he exclaimed as we left the door of our host: "what purpose, what beneficial end is accomplished by meeting together to eat and drink till nature is oppressed or the spirits become boisterous? Oh! for some object worthy of existence, some pleasures deserving the name, something to rescue life from insipidity and disgust!"

During this exclamation we were walking along the streets of W——. It was late, and they were nearly deserted and silent, except that the quick footsteps of an occasional passenger and the noise of nocturnal revelry from some of the taverns now and then broke on the

ear. The moon was in the meridian, the sky cloudless, and the atmosphere calm. On the bridge that led from the town we paused to look at the scene and to listen to the flow of the current. All was tranquil; the freshness of the air was grateful to the feverish state of men just risen from the convivial board, and the beauty of the night soothed us into calmness of feeling. "I never feel my own weakness or the vanity of human life more," said Rodney, breaking the silence into which we both had fallen, "than when I look at that glorious moon and those myriads of resplendent stars. I feel myself, while I gaze on those eternal bodies, a mere bubble on the stream of time, floating along for a period, but soon to disappear. What permanent connection have I with this goodly earth and yon splendid heavens? When I turn from these to men and their habitations, what vanity, what folly, what meanness appears in their pursuits. The thousands of human beings who are now sleeping unconscious in the town which we have just quitted, will rise to-morrow and enter with eagerness on their several careers, as if they were straining after some object which was to confer im-

mortal happiness; and yet what do all their efforts amount to? In what do they all terminate? In securing a few animal gratifications, or a few fugitive smiles and transient acclamations from those around them. And what an ardour and bustle in attaining these trivial ends, these transitory enjoyments. What an immensity of hope and zeal and agitation! What anger and resentment, what hypocrisy, dishonesty, and falsehood! I view these things sometimes with loathing, sometimes with indifference; but can any thing be more wretched than the destiny of mankind hurrying them headlong after trifles not worthy of a moment's rational attention?"

"You appear," I replied, "to have a morbidly acute perception of the evils of the world and of the weaknesses and vices of human nature. Surely, many human pursuits are noble and elevating, and productive of real happiness. It is, you must allow, no enviable state of mind to look with indifference, or even distaste, on the common engagements of men."

"In that remark," he rejoined, "I entirely coincide with you. I look upon it as a real misfortune to have this perspicacity of what is

evil, this tendency to pierce through the superficial pageantry of life to the misery that lurks beneath, producing an apathy to the allurements of those objects which engross the ardour of all around me : I would by no means encourage it in others ; I discourage it in myself, but it has seized on my mind, and no efforts can shake it off. You may restrain ardour, you may reduce enthusiasm ; but you cannot create passion or renovate feelings which have become deadened by experience or reflection."

My friend here ceased, and we walked on for a time in silence, which I at length interrupted by asking him if he had always felt in the same way. " By no means," he replied. " I once enjoyed life as much as any one. I felt intense enthusiasm in the pleasures of love, of friendship, of social intercourse, of ambition, of mental exertion, and improvement. But after a few years I found that all these things began to lose their charms. I no longer felt the same eagerness in pursuit, nor the same zest at attainment. Many things in which I formerly wished to excel seemed unworthy of attention. I grew into the habit of looking at

the real nature and ultimate consequences of every thing. Whatever blandishments they might display in their course, I was not prevented from scrutinizing their termination. I could not partake of a pleasure without analysing its composition, nor feel a passion or propensity without stripping their objects of the warm colouring of fancy. My pleasures began to be those of the intellect only. Imagination, which in my early youth had overflowed its banks, seemed to subside to their level, or rather to sink below them. The past looked sunny and smiling, but the future cold, colourless, and dreary. I was not, however, without some transient relapses into the warmth of youthful fancy and feeling. A trivial circumstance would sometimes rouse me to something like former enthusiasm, but the effect was fugitive, and my habitual apathy returned. In this state of mind I could not help looking with a sort of despondency at the years I had to live. If so early in life all zest and novelty were gone, if the hues of imagination had already faded, what a melancholy prospect was before me ! what a deep gloom

might be expected to hang over every succeeding stage of existence.

But in my inquisition into the follies of every passion, I did not miss the folly of such melancholy views. I tried to prevent myself from being affected by their gloom, and I found that by scrutinizing their character, I neutralized their influence.

I derived some amusement, not unmixed with pain, in turning this scrutinizing propensity on my own moral and intellectual qualities. I made my own character as distinct an object of study as if it had been an external object. I did not commit an error of any kind, but I felt its real quality. Every one of my actions, indeed, was the subject of a subsequent, almost simultaneous examination; my thoughts were a running commentary on the text of my life; and I felt indignant at my own unworthiness, laughed at my ludicrous mistakes, took pity on my weaknesses, as if they had concerned another.

In turning this scrutinizing propensity on society, I could not help seeing the emptiness of men's professions, the worthlessness of their

principles, the meanness of their actions, and the futility of their pleasures. My own apathy to the usual objects after which they aspired, enabled me to mark with more clearness the vanity of their aims and the vices of the methods which they took to attain them. Besides, I will not conceal that I have personally suffered in the bustle and contention of the world. I have confided my property to men who have betrayed their trust; I have been imposed upon by the artful and assailed by the rapacious. I have seen the finest feelings of friendship and generosity over-mastered by the gradual approaches of avarice and ambition, and the most rigid integrity relax before the temptations of an unexpected crisis. In fact, before I withdrew into the comparative retirement in which I now live, I found myself in a constant struggle with the bad passions of my species, and seemed to myself to be continually called upon to repel the encroachments which the cupidity and injustice of those around me were always attempting to make. In the bitterness of my heart, I have exclaimed, with Seneca, "*Hic ex privato, hic ex publico, hic ex profano, hic ex sacro rapit :—nemo non*

fert aliquid ex altero." After all these confessions, you will not wonder that I feel as I do, and break out sometimes into the expression of sentiments which may appear morose and misanthropical." During this conversation we arrived at his door, where we parted, after having, from a sort of common instinct, stood for some minutes gazing with admiration at the uncommon beauty of the night.

My friend is by no means singular in his feelings; I have met with other men who seem to have the same propensity, and the same power to penetrate the surface of things, and strip them of the illusion of the fancy and the passions—a power which conduces little to the happiness and not much to the agreeableness of the possessor. It divests life of a number of its charming, though perhaps illusive, associations, by detecting the emptiness of pleasures, the hollowness of friendship, the fickleness or feebleness of love, and the thousand selfish passions and purposes, the malignity and licentiousness which lurk under the exterior decorum and hypocritical civility of the world. When these considerations are always uppermost in the mind, it may be ques-

tioned whether they do not lead to a perversity of views. It is as if a man, instead of suffering himself to admire the swelling outline and beautiful complexion of a lovely woman, were to dwell on the thought that all this loveliness is but skin-deep, and that the deprivation of a thin membrane would turn it into a loathsome spectacle. This would evidently be only giving one set of associations a predominance over another set, to which in such a case they ought to be subordinate. The fair and blooming surface ought to be the boundary—the ne plus ultra of our imagination, when we have female beauty before us. What greater wisdom is there in allowing the mind to be affected by ideas not obviously suggested, than suffering it to be acted upon by those which nature evidently intended should prevail. If any one were to say to me, “Life’s a farce, why should you allow it to interest you so powerfully?” I would reply, “If it interests me so powerfully, why should I consider it a farce? I have certain feelings which are excited by objects of a contemptible and ludicrous character, and during the prevalence of which life may appear a farce. I have other feelings, which are ex-

cited by objects of an agreeable and exalted nature, and which give me a powerful interest in life. Why should I suffer the former feelings to predominate over the latter?"

This analytic power, this scrutinizing faculty, by laying bare many illusions and disenchanting many objects, may sometimes save from disappointment; but it is on the whole fortunate, that natural feelings and associations usually rise up and assert their predominance.

As a contrast to the character of Rodney, I will cite the instance of another friend of mine, who, although of middle age, enters into the pursuits and pleasures of life with all the spirit of youth. Whatever he undertakes, he prosecutes with heart and soul. His enthusiasm carries away his friends as well as himself. You wonder indeed that he should lavish so much zeal and fervour on what a sedate mind regards as a matter of little importance, but by degrees you catch a portion of his spirit, and find yourself at length embarked with him in an enterprise of which a few hours before you would have been half ashamed, on account of its insignificant object. Unlike my friend Rodney, who sees in mankind a set of sharks,

tigers, and crocodiles, Wentworth (the name, I think, is not unknown to you) is constantly meeting with the most amiable and estimable characters, and regards the world as the splendid theatre of virtue and heroism. I confess, for my own part, I have been so far a sharer in the feelings of my misanthropical friend, that when I have been reading biographical works, in which a succession of beautiful, noble, honourable, and fascinating personages pass over the scene, I have often regretted that I had not been fortunate enough to meet with so much excellence in actual life, and been inclined to think that I had been fated to come into the world at a time and place peculiarly unfavourable in regard to the specimens of human nature to which they introduced me. Even the distinguished characters whom I have occasionally met with, have appeared to me to fall short of the superiority usually ascribed to them. I have been sometimes inclined to extend the remark of Mandeville on this subject beyond the frequenters of courts and the possessors of power: "If you ask me," says he, "where to look for those beautiful shining qualities of prime ministers

and the great favourites of princes, that are so finely painted in dedications, addresses, epitaphs, funeral sermons, and inscriptions, I answer, *there*, and no where else.”*

But my friend Wentworth has had better luck. He cannot move a step without encountering some paragon of virtue and talents, and he lives on, forming schemes, contracting intimacies, and embarking in projects, undeterred by the disappointments which await every one, both in men and in things, and accounting for them, when they do occur, with great plausibility, and much more to his own satisfaction than to that of any body else.

Adieu.

F. R.

* Fable of the Bees, remark (o).

LETTER XII.

Conduct of Mankind under extraordinary Circumstances—
Earthquake at Caraccas—Pestilence at Athens—Impending
Danger at Bucharest—Revolution at Paris.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We human beings are an extraordinary race, and form an exhaustless subject of study. A man may certainly discern many general laws in the passions and propensities and actions of mankind, so as to calculate, with tolerable success, what results will ensue in given circumstances; but on some occasions he is obliged to abandon the attempt, and sink into a simple observer of unaccountable phenomena.

This remark often holds true of the actions of masses of men, while under the influence of extraordinary vicissitudes or excitement. Two or three instances of this kind have lately fallen in my way, which I will here collate and com-

pare. I am not sure that I can offer you any remarks upon them worth your attention, but the mere juxta-position of the cases cannot fail to suggest to every one an interesting train of reflections.

In the fourth volume of Humboldt's *Travels in the Equinoctial Regions*, he gives us the following description of the effects of a tremendous earthquake at Caraccas on the minds of the survivors. In this terrible catastrophe, which happened on the 26th of March, 1812, the town was destroyed, and more than twenty thousand persons perished almost at the same instant.

“Amidst so many public calamities, the people devoted themselves to those religious duties, which they thought were the most fitted to appease the wrath of Heaven. Some, assembling in processions, sung funeral hymns; others, in a state of distraction, confessed themselves aloud in the streets. In this town was now repeated what had been remarked in the province of Quito, after the tremendous earthquake of 1797: a number of marriages were contracted between persons, who had neglected for many years to sanction their union by the

sacerdotal benediction. Children found parents by whom they had never till then been acknowledged; restitutions were promised by persons who had never been accused of fraud; and families who had long been enemies were drawn together by the tie of common calamity. If this feeling seemed to calm the passions of some, and open the heart to pity, it had a contrary effect on others, rendering them more inhuman. In great calamities, vulgar minds preserve still less goodness than strength: misfortune acts in the same manner as the pursuits of literature and the study of nature; their happy influence is felt only by a few, giving more ardour to sentiment, more elevation to the thoughts, and more benevolence to the disposition."

The conduct here described is such, perhaps, as most people would think natural under any heavy calamity. The mind is prostrated by the infliction; the illusions of prosperity are destroyed, and the feeling of personal responsibility is preter-naturally aggravated by terror. How is it, then, to be accounted for, that the tremendous calamity which overwhelmed the Athenians in the second year of the Peloponnes-

sian War should produce moral effects of so different a character? In Thucydides' celebrated description of that great pestilence, he tells us that, as the violence of the calamity exceeded all bounds, and men knew not what to have recourse to, they fell into a neglect alike of sacred and social duties. "This pestilence," he continues, "gave rise to that unbridled licentiousness, which then first began to be prevalent in the city ; for now every one was readier to venture openly upon those gratifications which he had before dissembled, or indulged in secret, when he saw such sudden changes—the rich hurried away, and those who before were worth nothing coming into immediate possession of their property ; insomuch, that men were willing to snatch the enjoyment of such fugitive delights as offered themselves, and to live solely for pleasure, regarding their lives and their possessions as only held by the tenure of a day. As to bestowing labour or pains on any pursuit which seemed honourable or noble, no one cared about the matter, it being uncertain whether or not he might be snatched away previously to the attainment of his object. In short, whatever any person

thought pleasurable, or such as might in any way contribute thereto, *that* became with him both the *honourable* and *useful*. No fear of the gods, or respect for human laws, operated as any check: for, as to the *former*, they accounted it the same to worship or not to worship them, since they saw all alike perish; and as to the latter, no one expected that his existence would be prolonged till judgment should take effect, and he receive the punishment of his offences: nay, they supposed that a far heavier judgment, already denounced against them, hung over their heads; and, before it fell upon them, they thought it right to snatch *some* enjoyment of life.”*

The same effect of impending calamity is described in a work which, although a work of fiction, abounds with philosophic truth. “For a considerable time before this decisive event [the rout of the Turks at Riminik], Bucharest had been in that hopeless state—not devoid, perhaps, of its peculiar luxury—under whose influence people, regardless of a future which they may never witness, yield

* Bloomfield's Translation.

without further restraint to every wildest suggestion of the present moment, and, induced by the contemplation of inevitable ruin, rush with premeditated thoughtlessness into all the bold merriment of despair. Men and women, who never before had dared to throw off the trammels of public opinion, and had measured every moment, studied every gesture, and settled every look, until it was become impossible any longer to tell how nature had first moulded them, now resumed their original air and carriage and tone, and now for the first time cast away the irksome shackles of society, to display the genuine bent of their character. No longer listening to prudential considerations, which no longer could repay the sacrifices they cost, the irascible now yielded to their temper, the coarse to their brutality, the malignant to their spite, the covetous to their love of rapine ;—nay, even the prudes to their longing for open and unconstrained gallantry.”*

How is it, I repeat, that in these instances the effects of surrounding and impending calamity should differ so widely? Why should

* Anastasius, vol. 2, p. 336.

the sense of moral responsibility be quickened in the one case into an almost morbid acuteness, and be so completely benumbed, if not deadened, in the other?

I am not writing a philosophical treatise, and I will therefore restrain myself to a few suggestions. Perhaps, in the instance first adduced, the circumstances of the calamity affect the imagination more vividly with the idea of supernatural power. The convulsions of the solid earth, the instantaneous destruction of the proudest monuments of human art, the mysterious mutterings, or awful thunders bursting on the ear, and the chasms yawning on the sight, overwhelm the mind with conceptions of the immediate operation of some vast, although invisible agency. Even an ordinary thunder-storm has something of the same effect—

*“Ipse pater, mediâ nimborum in nocte, coruscâ
Fulmina molitur dextrâ : quo maxima motu
Terra tremit : fugère feræ : mortalia corda
Per gentes humilis stravit pavor.”*

In the case of the pestilence, these overwhelming indications of supernatural power are wanting. The approaches of sickness we

are accustomed to regard as in the ordinary course of nature. When we see them in others, they raise emotions only of pity or sympathy ; and when we apprehend them ourselves, there is no external apparatus of terrific sounds and appearances, to impress an idea of superhuman energy on our imaginations.

This will account in some measure for the difference of moral effect ; for whatever brings into vivid apprehension the power to which we consider ourselves responsible, must inevitably heighten our sense of accountability.

Where no such circumstances exist to overcome the imagination, it is consonant with other phenomena of human nature, that there should be an increase of licentiousness under very awful calamities. The fact shows how much of the virtue of the world is owing to the restraints which we mutually impose on each other. When any circumstances release us from these checks, we seem to seize with avidity the opportunity of indulgence—an avidity not at all lessened by the consideration, that the opportunity is likely to be of short duration.

I shall close this letter, which I fear you will

think meagre in every thing but quotation, by a passage from Madame de Stael, describing the state of feeling in Paris during some of the bloodiest scenes of the French revolution. It was a state which we should not, antecedently to experience, have conceived as probable, but which, on reflection, will not appear altogether unnatural. It furnishes a proof how soon the sympathies of man with his fellow men may be deadened by familiarity with scenes of cruelty and bloodshed.

“The populace,” she says, “and even the citizens, were not struck by the calamities of the elevated classes. The inhabitants of Paris walked about the streets, like the Turks during the plague, with this single difference, that obscure persons could easily enough preserve themselves from danger. Within view of the executions, the places of public entertainment were filled as usual; romances were published, entitled, *A New Sentimental Voyage, Dangerous Friendship, Ursula and Sophia*; in short, all the insipidity and all the frivolity of life subsisted by the side of its gloomiest frenzies.”

All this seems at first sight little accordant

with the observation often quoted, that a theatre would soon be deserted, even during the most affecting tragedy, if it were announced to the audience that an execution was on the point of taking place in the neighbouring square. To what a deplorable familiarity with bloodshed must a people have sunk, who could sit at a theatrical exhibition of any kind, while the most intensely affecting event in the whole compass of human endurance was passing on the scaffold at the door !

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XIII.

Absorbing Influence of Personal Interests — Tendency in some Men to overrate whatever belongs to themselves—
Description of an Individual of this Class—An opposite Character.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is amusing enough to observe how wholly engrossed the generality of human beings are in their own individual pursuits, and how little interest they feel in what is entirely unconnected with their personal situation. Enter into conversation with them, and they will talk of their families, their business, their fame, or their fortune, but, if you start any topic of a general or abstract nature, they soon let you perceive that, although they may attempt to listen, their thoughts are gone in pursuit of other topics. It is only a few highly-gifted minds in whom the love of knowledge, of truth, and of intellectual exertion, has even a temporary predominance over personal interests.

This absorption of the individual in his own concerns is of course inconsistent, when extreme, with enlarged views of life and of the world. He looks around from that point only of the social system which he himself occupies, and considers every thing merely in relation to his own position. The description of the views and feelings of a beggar, in a small volume of clever poetry which I lately met with,* may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to almost every other profession :—

“ The tatter’d wretch, who scrapes his idle tunes,
Through our dull streets, on rainy afternoons ;
The lawless nuisance of the king’s highway,
Houseless and friendless, wander where he may ;
Suspected, spurn’d, unbound by social ties,
With none to mourn or miss him when he dies :
Still, to himself, that vagrant man appears
The central object of revolving spheres,
Not less than he, who sweeps with regal robe,
Half the circumference of the peopled globe.
All seem for *him* that eye or thought can view—
The ground he treads, and heaven’s ethereal blue,
The sheltering hovel he has gain’d from far,
And the faint glimmer of the utmost star ;
Nought he regards, by art or nature made,
But as it serves his pleasure or his trade :

* Essays in Rhyme, by Jane Taylor.

Mankind, should he define them, this the sense—
Things bearing purses—purses yielding pence ;
The ranging doors that meet his practis'd eye, .
But places seem where he may knock and try ;
Where'er he stands, creation's dearest spot,
For what were all to him if *he* were not ?”

This consideration of every thing in relation to self, may be granted to be natural and unavoidable, but it may be reasonably insisted, after this ample concession, that we should be content with viewing objects ourselves in the light of our own importance, without endeavouring to make other people see them under the same peculiar illumination. We are apt to exaggerate the magnitude and value of every thing to which we devote great attention, were it for no other reason than this—that great attention to any thing necessarily involves, while it lasts, a forgetfulness of other claims and considerations. It is no wonder, therefore, that we are led to exaggerate the importance of whatever is our own, or affects ourselves; but to expect that our concerns should *loom* as large to other people, is weak, and often ludicrous. It may be all very well that the homely birds which haunt the green and the pond before our cottage, and occasionally salute the ear

with their sibilations, should assume in our eyes the size and stateliness of swans : only we should not insist on our neighbours entertaining the same peculiar ideas of form, grace, and magnitude.

One of my friends is very unreasonable in this respect. He pertinaciously compels every body to see things as he does ; and, as he has the happy faculty of shedding a lustre not its own on every object the instant it becomes his property, he may be said to be constantly engaged in dazzling the eyes of his acquaintance by the splendour of his possessions. He takes you through his house and grounds, shows you all from the dormitory to the dove-cote, launches out into separate eulogiums on every thing he shows, appeals to your good taste, and extorts your admiration. His crops are allowed to be the best in the whole country ; his horses have been pronounced by the most knowing jockies to be unrivalled ; the prospect from his window was lately seen by a traveller, who had made the picturesque tour of the world, and declared to be unique. After having drawn from your reluctant lips what he construes into an acquiescence in the justness of his praises,

he makes use of your authority to the next comer for all the eulogiums into which he is once more carried away by his self-complacent ardour ; and thus he goes on adding authority to authority, till, in his own conceit, he has the whole human race looking on him with envy and admiration.

One effect of this spirit of exaggeration in regard to every thing belonging to himself is, that it renders him, in his intercourse with society, wholly inattentive to that part of the conversation which is sustained by others. It surrounds him with an illuminated circle, in which all extraneous light, should any penetrate it, is lost. Vehement and animated while he is talking, he gives you little opportunity of bearing a part in the discourse, but when you take advantage of those pauses which the most loquacious are sometimes compelled to make, his ardour seems suddenly cooled, the glance of his eye appears to be turned inward, and his replies, often vague and beside the mark, indicate that you have not succeeded in securing his attention. You pause in your turn—he springs into the breach, and what he now pours forth (something, perhaps, totally foreign

to any topic you have touched upon) betrays the operations of his mind during the time that common decency had obliged him to assume the semblance of a listener.

In this way he often misses the very information which was of most importance to him. On one occasion he called on me to make inquiries, on behalf of a friend, respecting a business of some moment—inquiries which I distinctly and briefly satisfied. He appeared to listen, but his mind was in reality occupied by its own ruminations, and before I had well concluded, he burst forth into a description of some new improvements made on his estate, for which he proceeded, as usual, to exact the tribute of my commendation. I paid it, I have no doubt, with an alacrity and grace similar to those which commonly distinguish the intercourse of the king's dutiful subjects with his majesty's tax-gatherer. When my friend had reached home, a distance of half-a-dozen miles, the errand he had been upon came to his recollection; but it was in vain that he tasked his memory for the answers returned to his inquiries, and he was obliged to walk back, in order to beg me to furnish him once more with the

information, "which," he said, "he had so unaccountably forgotten."

There is a contrary character to this ; not, perhaps, a precise contrast, but extremely different, and it is well exemplified in my friend Durham. His distinguishing characteristic is an entire abstinence from all claims on others for applause, or admiration, or deference. He has, probably enough, a high opinion of himself ; perhaps might be termed proud ; and he is certainly delicate and refined, if not somewhat fastidious in his tastes : but he never puts forward any pretensions ; exacts no deference, no service, no attention, no homage of any kind. He appears, in fact, incapable of conceiving that he can be of much importance to other people, and is disposed to accept with wonder, as well as gratitude, any marks of respect or courtesy which he may chance to receive in his intercourse with the world.

It is not, as I have already said, from any deficiency of positive self-estimation that he thus feels and acts : it is rather from inability to form a correct conception of the place he holds in the esteem of others. He has an impression that people regard him as much lower

in the scale of importance than they really do. He fancies that he is generally looked upon as insignificant, or, at least, undistinguished from the crowd, and can hardly be persuaded to take the station in society to which he is universally invited. He receives, with doubt and hesitation, the tribute offered to him of deference and respect, as if he had misgivings that he was taking that to which he had no plain right, or to which, if he were called upon, he would find it difficult to make a clear title. Yet, perhaps, in his heart he feels it to be his just due ; he is conscious of some claims to superiority, in those moments, at least, when, in the calmness of solitude, he endeavours to appreciate all things at their real value : but when he mingles in society, when he comes in contact with the pretensions of others, he falls into the habit of considering himself not exactly as low in the scale of desert, not as inferior, if all were subjected to an accurate estimate, but as low in the scale of actual appreciation : he conceives that he is held as of little social importance, and that his claims to a higher consideration rest on circumstances into the merits of which others cannot enter.

This feeling extends to all that he possesses. He is never found showing his house or his grounds, or his furniture, or his pictures, with any thing like exultation at their being his or of his own planning or executing. He may, indeed, if people admire any of them, be betrayed by their admiration into a momentary feeling which may almost amount to vanity: but he never spontaneously displays them for the sake of drawing praise on himself, partly, perhaps, from the total absence of all expectation of such a result. If he does not underrate whatever he possesses, he certainly underrates its power of exciting admiration in the minds of others; and he is generally the readiest to admit any thing which is said in disparagement of what in any way appertains to himself.

I have known this cast of mind in men of great talents; and not all the reputation they have acquired, not all the distinctions to which they have been raised, have been able to overcome entirely this mistrust of their comparative importance in the eyes of their fellow-creatures, or prevent their relapsing from those feelings of confidence which all must experience in the first fervour of success, into their habitual diffi-

dence of their standing in the general estimation of the world.

I am not sure that the foundation of this mistrust is not a consciousness of how greatly they have failed to come up to their own ideas of excellence. Such men have formed a high standard of merit; they have a keen perception of their own deficiencies, and they are apt to imagine that every other person not only has the same standard, but can discern, with as much perspicacity, the vast interval which separates what they are from what they ought to be.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XIV.

Contrast of former with present Times—Inquiry whether our Age is less Poetical than its Predecessors—Effect of Time on our estimate of Literary Compositions—Prevalence of Reading in modern Days.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I mentioned in a preceding letter that I had been amusing myself with *Ivanhoe*. On closing the last volume, I took up a London newspaper, and I could not help being struck with the vast change which has supervened in the manners and habits of the people of England. In the one age we have battles and tournaments, lords and vassals, monks and nuns and abbeys, outlaws and forests, wild and pathless moors, rude and gloomy castles ; in the other, political associations and joint-stock companies, merchants and lawyers, engineers and mechanics, Methodist meeting-houses and manufactories, roads and canals, elegant villas and splendid mansions, amidst a country presenting

the aspect of one continuous garden. The banditti or forest-robbers have been superseded by poachers, pick-pockets, and swindlers. Instead of wandering minstrels, we have itinerant lecturers—public meetings instead of mock-battles—and eloquence instead of agility and prowess.

I mention merely a few points of difference : to enumerate all, would be a description of almost all the customs and institutions of the country. In contrasting these two states of society, we are apt to have a feeling of dulness, sameness, and lowness, when we consider our own. It seems to partake too much of mechanical existence ; to have too little in it of a character to excite the imagination. The past age, on the other hand, teems with romance : all its incidents are tinged with the visionary hues of association : we are roused into a fervour by the ideas of knights and castles and abbeys, and all that belongs to a state of society of which nothing but a scanty record now remains. Hence we are apt to infer that our own age is less poetical than its predecessors. There are two ways, however, in which this may be understood. Was a former age

more poetical to the persons who lived in it, or is it only more poetical to us?

A little consideration will probably show that it is true only in the last sense; that the effect is to be attributed to the associations superinduced upon the mind by the lapse of time; and that, to the inhabitants of any country, and the people of any age, their manners, customs, and institutions, are much the same common every-day things, possessing little power to awaken the imagination. That which is familiar can never induce this kind of excitation, which implies room for conjecture and invention. When we see an object perfectly, and can examine it on all sides, our minds are tied down to the actual fact: there is neither opportunity nor inducement to go beyond it. Place the object at a distance, and exhibit only a part; and the imaginative faculty starts into immediate alertness.

Many of the objects of common life are associated, too, with low and disagreeable ideas. Manufactories and meeting-houses, made up of red bricks and blue tiles, for instance, present scenes not of the choicest sort, and calculated to awaken any thing but those

poetical conceptions which gather round Kenilworth Castle or Fountain's Abbey ; and yet it is not impossible that, in a future state of society, a description of them, as they now exist, may be employed by some master of the lyre with powerful effect on the imaginations of his readers. The author of Waverley has known how to invest the squabbles of the apprentices in London with something like historical interest ; and even the Jew of former times, whose profession of usurer must always in actual life have connected ideas of sordidness and meanness with his appearance, passes over the stage of the same author surrounded with a halo of exciting associations.

Only think how, after the lapse of a thousand or two thousand years, the imagination will be inflamed by the age of George the Third ! What a picturesque, poetical, and visionary sort of age, it will appear to the poets and novelists of the year 4000 ! What a hoary mist will be diffused over our present language. What nature and freshness and purity will be discovered in the expressions of these good old times, compared to the tasteless verbiage, forced slang, and exotic phrases, of the forty-

first century ! With what delight will a retrospective reviewer of that period seize on a dusty worm-eaten volume of Hayley or Southey, or the still more illustriously obscure, myself ! It is not to be doubted that every stray epic or tragedy of the present day, emerging from the oppression of contemporary malice or neglect, will be set forth as one of the finest productions of intellect.

The great effect of time on our estimate of poetical, and even prose compositions, is unquestionable. The removal of prejudice, envy, jealousy, and other feelings, which often interfere with the appreciation of a work during the life-time of the author, is not, however, what is most worthy of observation. There is a change constantly going on in the associations which words have the power of exciting, so that it is impossible for a literary work to produce the same effect, to rouse the same feelings, or even engender the same ideas, after the lapse of centuries, as it did at the time of its original appearance. After such an interval, we can no longer feel the force of peculiar idioms and expressions ;—the vinculum of association, which they had only to touch in the slightest

manner to create a powerful emotion, has been dissolved ; and we have often to wonder in what their potency consisted.

On this account, it is impossible for us to enter fully into the moral and poetical writings of another people. In the mind of the most thorough Grecian that was ever schooled in the learned halls of Oxford or Cambridge, the train of ideas and emotions suggested by the pages of Homer or Sophocles would bear only an imperfect resemblance to the series of impressions which the same verses generally produced on the contemporaries and successors of those gifted poets. We may read Horace with pleasure—but our pleasure is inevitably of a very different character from that of the Romans of his own day. Nor is this effect perhaps more the result of the associations we have lost, than those we have gained. We approach the writings of past times with all those new ideas and feelings which the vicissitudes of the world and the progress of society have infused into our understandings and our hearts. In addition to all this, there is the agreeable consciousness of a difficulty overcome, there is the pride of learning, the complacency of being

able to do what is in the power of few ; and the delight in our personal attainments pours beauty over passages which originally attracted no especial regard. The attention, too, is detained by want of familiarity with the terms, longer than in the case of contemporary productions ; and we know that any great intensity of the mind on a train or combination of ideas, is of itself sufficient to invest them with interest. All these circumstances combine to render the impressions now produced by ancient writings extremely different from those which they made on the original readers. “ We endeavour” (according to the happy remark of Dr. Ferguson), “ through the grammar of dead languages, and the channel of commentators, to arrive at the beauties of thought and elocution, which sprang from the animated spirit of society, and were taken from the living impressions of an active life.”*

These remarks have drawn me from the subject with which I commenced. I was going to observe, that the differences already pointed out between the feudal and the present times,

* Essay on the History of Civil Society.

imply a wonderful change in the habits of private life. In no respect, perhaps, is it more conspicuous than in the general prevalence of a taste for literature. However superficial we may be, we are eminently a reading generation. In the present state of society, the ~~world~~ would be a dreary place without books. As our population has become denser, and the arts of civilization have advanced, a greater number of people have been released from the necessity of incessant labour; they have long and regular and uninterrupted intervals of leisure; and others are wholly supported without any personal exertion. A great many tasks and undertakings, too, are much shortened. A journey which formerly took up half a day may be performed in half an hour, or the necessity of it perhaps altogether superseded, by dropping a letter into the Post Office, or committing a parcel to the stage-coach.

The consequence of all these facilities, is a great deal of spare time on the hands of a great many people; but fortunately the same progress in civilization and refinement, which has furnished the leisure, has furnished in books the means of employing it. Books!

There is a magic in the word to retired idlers like myself, inconceivable by you men of the world, and which almost necessarily impels us to break out into Cicero's "*peregrinantur, rusticantur.*" To us they have all the importance that actual events have to you. The opportunity of reading a work which, although of established merit, has never before fallen into our hands, or which is fresh from the pen of a celebrated writer, is as interesting an occurrence in our little world as the arrival of a messenger from Paris to a politician, or of a ship from the Indian Ocean to a merchant. But, what is more to my present purpose, books are certainly the great distinction of modern times. Contrast, for a moment, the few works written two or three centuries ago, and the few readers who looked into them, with the multiplicity of publications in the present day, perused by all classes, high and low, and you will feel at once the immense difference. The savage, when he is not hunting or gormandising, sleeps; the semi-barbarian, in his intervals of leisure, drinks or games; the cultivated man takes up a book. Now, in our country, as in all countries, there are some of all these classes;

but the changes which I have adverted to, imply, I think, that the two former are diminishing in numbers, and gradually elevating themselves into the latter. May the process never stop from any other cause than its completion.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XV.

Integrity of Mind—Scope for the Exercise of this Quality in all the Transactions of Life—Instance of it in a Lover.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

There is nothing in human nature—no quality of mind, no feature of character,—which stands higher in my estimation, than strict and uncompromising integrity. Who does not feel an elevation of soul truly delightful, on witnessing that impartial observance of justice, when a man has to decide between his own claims and those of others, which is so easy when the judge is a disinterested person ?

This rigid uprightness is a far rarer quality than humanity or benevolence, and it seems to depend partly on clearness of conception and precision of judgment, as well as on conscientious feeling. There is about many people

who may be styled good sort of men, and who have no particular design to injure others, or unfairly benefit themselves, an indolent indistinctness of apprehension, a careless laxity of thought, which has often all the bad effects of deliberate dishonesty.

I am not alluding merely to pecuniary transactions, although these are the cases in which the possession or the want of integrity is the soonest conspicuous, and the most readily appreciated by vulgar comprehension, but to actions of all kinds. There is scarcely one of our dealings with our fellow-men but admits of fairness and unfairness. In the necessary intercourse of social life—in the commerce of civility, in the pursuits of pleasure, in the affairs of business, in the offices of charity, in the theatre or the ball-room, the street or the tavern—in friendship, in ambition, in love—there are a thousand occasions when no pecuniary interest is at stake, on which there is abundant scope for the exercise of integrity of spirit.

An instance in point lately came to my knowledge, and one not belonging to matters of state or business, but arising out of an affair

of love. A friend of mine, Mr. C——, some time ago conceived an affection for a young lady of his own rank of life ; in the opinion of the lady herself, of a rank rather above his. In an unguarded moment, without premeditation, he was led into some proofs of tenderness which he conceived he was in honour bound to follow up with an offer of his hand, before he knew sufficient of the lady's temper, disposition, and other qualities, to justify him in his own cooler judgment for venturing on so important a step. There are moments, you know, when a man relaxes from his usual circumspection ; as for instance when the interesting beauty of a female hanging on his arm on a fine summer's evening, or playing on the piano, and looking back with a face upturned to his, radiant with smiles, seduces him into peculiarly soft-toned whispers, or other intelligible intimations that his heart is not quite untouched. Such interesting flirtations may appear but blooming and fragrant wreaths of roses, which fetter nobody that is entangled in them, except for the evening, and then naturally fade and perish ; but they sometimes turn to firm and permanent chains. By some little

advances of this kind, which every one may imagine for himself, C—— felt committed, and, entertaining at the same time an admiration not quite platonic for the lady, he followed them up with an explicit declaration of his sentiments. It was received as he wished, and he was thenceforward admitted into the family on the footing of an accepted suitor. He was in an ecstasy of bliss : but there is always something happening to reduce the pulsations of rapture to a more moderate beat. He had seen Matilda hitherto only at balls and parties, where ladies, always perfect, are particularly and expressly so ; and (if such things admit of degrees) put on their most engaging looks and most angelic dispositions. He now saw her at home, in familiar intercourse with father and mother, brothers and sisters, and with himself. He saw how she conducted herself amongst the multitudinous casualties of daily life, which it is beneath the dignity of narration to record : the disappointment of anticipated pleasures ; requests from father or mother which thwarted rational and innocent inclinations ; contests with unreasonable brothers or sisters for some privilege or prece-

dence ; “ mantuas pinned awry ;” bonnets and dresses sent home from the milliners in a state of unfitness, or imperfect development (pardon the awkwardness of my phraseology on such a subject) : and, notwithstanding the blindness of passion, the truth gradually dawned on my friend’s intellectual vision, that the object of his affections had a temper which even the restraint of his presence failed to subdue into sweetness. And if he had any doubt on the subject at first, from witnessing her behaviour to others, his personal experience would soon have removed it. She was constantly taking the irregularity of his visits as the text of a lecture, or the basis of a frown. If he failed, from some unavoidable engagement, to pay his respects at the accustomed hour, he learned to his sorrow, that the face of beauty from which he had, *à priori*, inferred that all expression of anger or sullenness, if it chanced to alight there, would fall off as naturally as the rain-drops from the plumage of the eagle or the swan, was not invariably illuminated with good humour. And if he at all opposed her inclinations, even as to a walk, although for her own good, or indicated a

difference of opinion in regard even to so small a matter as a poem or a picture, the consequences of his ill-timed independence reminded him that the sea was not the only thing in the world apt to exhibit a ruffled surface on very slight provocation. He realized the prediction of Horace—

“ Heu quoties fidem
Mutatosque deos flebit, et aspera
Nigris æquora ventis,
Emirabitur insolens.”

On more intimate conversation with her, too, he began to have glimpses of the no very pleasant truth, that she was a woman of slow intellect, narrow views, and strong prejudices. She was one with whom, notwithstanding her beauty, he felt a rainy day to be by no means an affair of brevity. In fact, after an experience of several weeks, serious suspicions intruded themselves, that he had acted with a precipitation which would tinge the remainder of his life with bitterness. With such a companion, he feared he could never be happy. There were moments when he would have given worlds to be freed from his engagement;

but, after his unreserved offer, a direct defection on his own part could not be thought of; and he was too high-minded to resort to any subterfuges to draw himself out of a connection which had been of his own seeking. An occasion, however, of doing so with honour, soon presented itself. It happened that a female cousin of his, from a distant part of the country, came on a visit to his sister; and, in order to make her visit agreeable, C—— escorted the ladies to several interesting objects in the neighbourhood; an excursion which occupied several days, and which necessarily occasioned an absence of longer duration than usual from his duties as a lover. He apologized to Matilda by note for the circumstance (the expedition having been arranged rather suddenly), and explained the reason, playfully alluding to the wit and beauty of his cousin as an excuse for being seduced from home. The moment he returned, he hastened to Matilda. He had almost forgotten during his short absence, or wished to forget, the unfavourable impressions which he had begun to conceive of her character; and dwelling

rather on her personal beauty, and on her affection for himself, he felt, as he approached the house, all the eagerness of a lover who has reason to calculate on a warm and cordial reception.

He found Matilda alone. He hastened to her with a face of pleasure, which, however, soon changed its expression : for she took not a step to meet him, held out no hand to welcome him, beamed upon him no smile of delight at his return. The suddenness of the check which his ardour experienced, almost deprived him of utterance, and he could scarcely express his fears that she was unwell. Her reply, accompanied with unsoftened looks, and delivered in a corresponding tone, was, “ that she was not ill, except as his behaviour had made her so. After what had passed, she had hoped to be spared this visit.” C.’s perplexity increased. What had passed ? He professed to be at a loss to understand her ; surely, she must be labouring under some mistake. She replied, with heightened colour and something of a sneer, that it was he who had made a mistake, in coming to a house he had deserted, instead of

remaining at home ; where it was evident there was an object of far superior attraction.—But he had explained, he said, the occasion of his absence in a letter. Was it possible that his note had miscarried !—A letter ! she exclaimed, she had long since learned to look at actions rather than words. She had no fault to find with his letter. She was not aware that it contained any thing that was not perfectly proper.—In what way, then, he asked, had he been so unfortunate as to offend her ? He was quite innocent of any intention to do it, and quite unconscious of any thing in his conduct at which she could justly take umbrage. His absence had been occasioned in the way explained in his note, and in no other. He was proceeding, but she interrupted him, by rising from her seat, and declaring that she was not wishful to draw from him any apology or explanation. She was perfectly satisfied, and her determination was taken. Since he had given his affection to another, it was only proper that he should let his attentions take the same direction. They must part. C—— was thunderstruck. He could scarcely believe her

serious ; but he found all explanations ineffectual. All that he could draw from her was, that she could not admit his future addresses, except he would pledge himself to see the obnoxious lady, her fancied rival, no more. This was a degrading stipulation, to himself, to the lady in question, to all parties concerned, which he could not consent to, could not for a moment entertain. It was a violence to his nature which was impossible. He therefore left the house, a discarded lover.

With surprise at the strangeness of the incident, and real pain at a separation from one whom he had regarded with ardent affection, there mingled in his mind an incongruous feeling of satisfaction that he was now free from a connection condemned by his judgment, and this without the least reflection on his honour and integrity.

It happened that, just at this time, by the death of a distant relative, he unexpectedly received a large accession of fortune—so large, indeed, as to raise him considerably in the scale of society, and to open to him connections of a higher rank than he had been in the habit of

looking to. This circumstance caused him to scrutinize his conduct in the affair with Matilda more closely, perhaps, than he would otherwise have done ; jealous lest the new position in which he was placed should lead him to overlook what good faith rigidly demanded. The result of the scrutiny was a conviction, that it would not be acting with an equitable degree of indulgence—such as he himself would expect in a similar case—were he not to give her an opportunity of recalling her rash determination. To break off the connection without a further effort to prevent it on his part, would savour little, he thought, of that generosity of spirit which he was accustomed to admire in others, and with which he always desired to be treated. It might be literally correct, and even not dishonourable ; but he felt as if it would arise from an undue eagerness to free himself from the fetters of a connexion which his judgment, indeed, disapproved, but into which he had voluntarily entered. She had acted from some false impression—from momentary passion—and, perhaps, already repented the violence of her procedure ; and it was surely not for him to take advantage of the inexperience of a

young girl, whose affections he had done all in his power to gain, and who was imperfectly aware of the injury which she was doing to her own happiness.

Full of these generous sentiments, he wrote to her, explaining again the simple business of his accompanying his sister and his cousin on an excursion—his two sisters he might call them, for he regarded them with the same feelings—and declaring that the supposition of any other kind of attachment was groundless. He therefore begged Matilda would reconsider her determination, and not rashly throw from her one in whom she had confessed herself interested, and who still cherished for her more regard than he had ever entertained for any other woman. His affection, as well as his sense of duty, induced him to make this one effort more to prevent a total and final rupture, which must be the consequence of an unfavourable answer.

Matilda's feelings were what he suspected. She had bitterly repented of her conduct—perhaps the accession to his fortune had had no tendency to reconcile her to herself—and she would have given the universe to recall

her lover. But so little was she able to comprehend the generous delicacy of his conduct, that when she received this note, when the chance of repairing her error was offered to her, she saw in it only a proof that he was too deeply in love with her charms for any thing to estrange him ; and, with the infatuation of a little mind, she determined to bring him to her feet on her own terms, anticipating a triumph which would have degraded both. Her answer, penned in full confidence that she could mould him to her purpose, contained, accordingly, a repetition of the condition before rejected, as the only one on which she could consent to renew a connexion which she confessed was not indifferent to her ; and she begged that, if he found it inconsistent with his views to comply with her wishes in so small a matter, all correspondence between them might cease. This foolish reply was, of course, treated as it deserved. That cessation of intercourse which was desired took place, and the lady waited, day after day, at first with a confident, then with a misgiving, and, ere long, with an aching heart, for an answer which never came. She was doomed to unavailing regret that she had

thrown from her a man of talents, integrity, and honour.

They occasionally met in the houses of their common friends, and it was amusing to those who had learned the particulars of the affair, to watch the kind and cheerful, but somewhat ceremonious politeness with which he invariably treated her; a manner in which there was evidently no lingering admiration or affection, but at the same time neither displeasure nor coolness. In her's, however, a close observer might detect a mixed indication of tenderness and resentment, amidst all the indifference she wished to assume. It would leave the story destitute of poetical justice, if I did not add, that he subsequently married a lady every way calculated to make him happy, and whose interest in his behalf was first excited by the story of his upright and delicate conduct in his first attempt to enter the temple of Hymen. As a husband, his character stands as high as the whole of his behaviour previously would lead us to expect; and his wife seems fully sensible that she has drawn a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

So much for the story;—and now, as my

letter has trespassed beyond the usual limits, I will hasten to conclude.

It has been remarked by some one, that honesty is no very exalted virtue—that it is, in fact, one of the commonest qualities we meet with, and that the line of Pope's—

“ An honest man's the noblest work of God—”

implies but a pitiful estimate of human excellence. Looking at the subject, however, in the comprehensive view already suggested, taking the term as importing that spirit of rectitude which rejects all undue advantages of whatever kind, and judges of our own claims and those of others with equal impartiality; which will not wantonly wound the feelings of another any more than destroy his property; which is as scrupulous not to deprive a neighbour of a pleasure, as not to defraud him of his wealth; which equally forbids to disappoint expectations we have raised, and to refuse the payment of debts we have contracted, I should pronounce Pope not far wrong. A rectitude like this is, undoubtedly, one of the most exalted of the virtues. He who possesses it cannot be a bad

man: he who is destitute of it cannot be a good one. Without it the most unbounded benevolence (could we suppose them to exist apart) would deservedly sink into boundless contempt.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XVI.

A Public Meeting—Passages from a Speech delivered there—
Effect of the Presence of Large Numbers on the Nerves—
Difficulty to a Speaker of estimating the Effect produced on
his Audience.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A few days ago I attended a public meeting, held in a neighbouring town, to petition Parliament on the subject of the Catholic claims. You know sufficiently well how these affairs are conducted, and I therefore will not trouble you with any detailed account of what passed on the occasion. The speeches consisted of the usual arguments, a little modified, indeed, by the handling, but still essentially the same as those which all of us have heard a hundred times before.

There was, indeed, only one passage in the whole display of eloquence, which impressed itself on my mind with sufficient vividness to

enable me to report it. It formed part of the speech of a little, pale-looking, meagre man in black, with a quick eye and a broad forehead. Who he was I could not learn, but I was struck with the peculiar turn of his imagery. "All the reasons," said he, "that I have heard for excluding Catholics from Parliament, are allegations of mere possibilities. Should they be admitted (it is said), they may vote away our rights, get possession of our churches, form a majority in the ministry and privy council, or even elevate one of their own body to the throne, if not convert the monarch already upon it. And these, which are hardly to be called possibilities, are to be received as reasons for continuing to exclude them from the legislature. Of all weak things, of all foolish things, acting on mere possibilities is the weakest and most foolish. Any one who did so in ordinary life would cut a ridiculous figure. It is possible that his house may fall, he therefore runs out of doors, but, in rushing out of doors, he is met by the possibility that he may be bitten by a mad dog, or assassinated by a Catholic : being thus prevented by his fears of what may happen from remaining either within

or without, being thus bandied from one possibility to another, he can have no resource, no *tertium quid*, that I can see, but some impossibility, and I should advise him to ascend to the moon as the fittest place, according to etymology at least, for lunatics of his description.

“ These apprehended dangers are, in fact, mere bugbears, and require only to be handled to vanish. Those who are frightened by them, are like a timid girl in bed, who, starting in the night, half dreaming, half awake, fancies she sees an apparition in her chamber, and, covering her head with the bed-clothes, lies, trembling, the victim of imaginary terrors. A bold man in the same circumstances jumps out of bed, and, on approaching the object, finds it to be nothing but a cloak hung against the wall, or, perhaps, the light of the moon stealing through the curtains of the window. Just so it is with the Catholic Question. If you look at the consequences of concession while lying with drowsy faculties in the darkness of your own indolence, they will assume a terrific aspect to the hurried glance which you cast on them, before you bury your terrors in the exclusive laws to which you cling for defence

and protection ; but if you have the manliness to face them, they shrink into harmless results—old cloaks or mere moonshine.”

This speaker, as well as most of the others, was, when he began, evidently labouring under considerable nervous agitation. It is a curious effect of the presence of large numbers. I have seen men of apparently the strongest nerves tremble like an aspen leaf on rising to address a numerous assembly. Nor is it peculiar to modern times. We have Cicero’s testimony that it was a common circumstance, with both himself and others, to turn pale and tremble in every limb at the commencement of a speech.* And Seneca, in his eleventh epistle, tells us, that “ some of the most steady temper, when obliged to speak in public, have been known to perspire as if they had been fatigued with running a race ; while others have been so affected on the like occasion, as to have their knees tremble, their teeth chatter, their tongue falter, or their lips so close that they cannot open

* His own words are :—“ *Equidem et in vobis animadvertere soleo et in me ipso sæpissime experior, ut exalbescam in principiis dicendi, et tota mente et omnibus artubus contremiscam.*”

their mouth. And this bashfulness," he adds, "neither discipline nor use can shake off: nature will still prevail, and admonish even the strongest of their weakness." He mentions, also, that Pompey, whose countenance was soft and pleasing, always blushed when in company, and especially when he made a public oration. Plutarch says of Alcibiades, "that although he was as sagacious and happy in his thoughts as any man whatever, yet, for want of a little assurance, he very often miserably lost himself in his pleadings; and would falter and make pauses in the middle of an oration, purely for the want of a single word or some neat expression that he had in his papers, and could not presently recollect."

It cannot be expected that an acquaintance with the defects of others should entirely cure our own, yet a review of weaknesses which distinguished characters have exhibited, may, at all events, prevent us from being discouraged at finding ourselves subject to feelings in which they so largely participated. The young man who, while he is conscious of the genius within him, struggles with the oppressive sense of the presence of his fellow-creatures, and trembles

and hesitates in attempting to give utterance to his conceptions, is frequently disheartened by the recollection of his own agitation, regarding it as an unmanly weakness peculiar to himself, as a natural defect, degrading him in the eyes of others, and exciting their pity or contempt ; and, stung with the thought of this fancied degradation, he abandons the field to such as nature has not cursed with the same imbecility of nerve and deficiency of manhood. Such a one may be restored to self-confidence by knowing that the agitation which he has suffered has been felt by some of the most illustrious of men, and, although he may still be conscious of the fluttering heart and faltering voice when he attempts a public address, he will no longer regard them as betraying any discreditable peculiarity, or as forming any insurmountable barrier to the loftiest eminence. For my own part, I should suspect that a man who was entirely free from this sort of trepidation, could scarcely possess that sensibility which seems indispensably requisite for the higher species of eloquence.

You may, perhaps, be curious to know whether I personally mingled in the contest of

words, and how I acquitted myself. It is only the first part of such an inquiry that I should be able to satisfy, for, though I uttered a speech on the occasion, I am totally unable to recollect what I said, or to judge of the impression which it made. And I have experienced the same inability in almost every attempt of the kind which I have been induced to venture upon. On closely examining the matter, the cause seems to be, that what a speaker utters is only part of a complex process going on in his own mind ; at least, such is the fact in my own case. When I have been speaking, thoughts and expressions have presented themselves, from which I have had to select some and discard the rest ; my pre-conceived purposes have been modified by new suggestions ; there have been efforts of memory and attempts to grasp fugitive notions or to complete imperfect developments, and, perhaps, regret and perplexity at failure, or satisfaction at success ; and through all there has been a constant struggle to preserve a connected order in the ideas expressed, and in the language employed to exhibit them. All these have, to my own mind, formed the effort in which I have been engaged ; and many of them

have been more prominent in my consciousness than the actual series of words, the utterance of which has been the result.

But it is this series of words alone which has been perceptible to the auditor, and hence his impression and my own may, at the close, be widely at variance. To myself I may have appeared attempting to arrange a motley and undisciplined crowd of ideas, which were perpetually falling out of their ranks, while to him nothing may have been visible but an orderly procession of thought, clothed in language of suitable colours.

It has often struck me, that from the same cause we are frequently imperfect judges of our personal behaviour, and find it difficult to know what impression it leaves on those amongst whom we live. We have thoughts and feelings passing in our mind while we are acting, which appear as large in importance as the actions themselves, and which must modify our conception of our own conduct, but which are invisible to others, and, therefore, left out of their appreciation.

Adieu.

F. R.

LETTER XVII.

Modern Style—Imperfect Expression—Verbosity—Defects in the Style of Lord Byron—Third Canto of Childe Harold—Influence of Rhyme on the turn of Thought—In Poetry nothing should appear to be the consequence of the Trammels of Versification.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The subject which I have selected for my present letter will probably appear uninteresting to one like yourself, occupied in attention to things, and having little time to bestow on mere words.

It would not be difficult to show, however, that words themselves are most important things; that on their proper and judicious employment the happiness of mankind greatly depends; and that their influence extends over the fate of those who reject them as too insignificant for their consideration.

But my design, on the present occasion, is more limited. It is merely to present you with a few desultory observations on style, and

more particularly on the style of our modern writers. It is a characteristic, I think, of modern composition, both in prose and verse (I speak of the mass), that it is unfinished and incomplete. We seldom meet with any thing like perfect expression of the thought intended to be conveyed. Either the writer falls short of his actual meaning, or expresses himself vaguely and without precision, or, what is perhaps more common, he heaps one word upon another, either from sheer ambition to say more than he has got to say, or that the imperfect manner in which the first term conveys the intended sense may be compensated by the accumulation of other terms. He gives, perhaps, three words instead of one; not that he requires the full power of the three for his purpose: he employs so many, either because his desire of pouring forth transcends his materials, or because each of them seems partially to express the idea he wishes to communicate, yet not fully or precisely; and he hopes that, by presenting the whole together, they will mutually qualify each other, and yield conjointly the peculiar import which they could not singly furnish. This happens not only

with words, but with phrases and sentences. If the writer fails in one sentence, he tries to exhibit his meaning in a second ; and if that should seem still insufficient, he introduces a third, and still another, till he feels satisfied that the whole of what he intended is fully expressed. These strenuous efforts and repeated failures are sometimes owing to an incapability of finding suitable language for the ideas in the mind of the writer ; but perhaps they are oftener to be ascribed to a vagueness and vacillation in the ideas themselves. If his ideas are not distinct, his language cannot be precise, and he is obliged to accumulate one word upon another to make up a resemblance of what is passing in his own mind.

Thus, verbosity is the consequence sometimes of ambitious barrenness of thought, longing to be prolific ; sometimes, of want of skill in language ; but perhaps, most frequently, of vagueness of conception sedulously striving after a meaning. The following passage, from a writer by no means devoid of talent, seems to have been indited under the combined operation of all these causes. It is a rich specimen of wordiness.

“New compilations, also, are serviceable on all subjects, admitting improvements and accommodation to the passing times, because all men write most successfully and intelligibly for the age in which they live. Whatever may be our admiration of the glowing sentiments and splendid eloquence of the great writers of antiquity, every day and every hour present our own age in aspects and under circumstances, that, for all purposes of practical utility and instruction, chains down the mind to the contemplation of the present, and causes its existing interests, passions, prejudices, habits, evils, conveniences, hopes, and fears, to predominate over those of past ages, which are already mingled with the years beyond the flood.”

Here the writer had to express the very simple idea, that our own times are necessarily more interesting to us than past ages; but not knowing exactly his own meaning,—wishing, too, to say a great deal, and not being fully master of the delicate instrument he was employing, he has thrown together a brilliant heap of words, from which it is not easy to extract an intelligible proposition.

In many cases, we see clearly the writer's meaning, although he has not expressed himself with either fulness or precision : we comprehend what he wishes to convey as perfectly as if his language had united perspicuity and exactness ; and we admire, perhaps, the beauty or sublimity of the thought : but, amidst the greatest admiration, we cannot help a feeling of the inadequacy of his expressions, a sense of incongruity, which impairs the effect of the intellectual power displayed. I have many times observed in myself a feeling of this sort, in reading the works of Lord Byron. The poet's language is often extremely felicitous ; the united beauty and condensation of thought and diction are in places most admirable ; and passages might be produced from almost every one of his productions, which in point of perfectness of expression cannot be excelled. But often—I will not say generally—he has fallen far short of this excellence. His meaning is better than his language. We cannot say of him as Horne Tooke said of Junius, *materiam superabat opus*. He is sometimes obscure from the omission of words necessary for explicitness, or at least usually inserted, and the

want of which occasions a stumble or pause on the part of the reader. Sometimes he uses terms in uncommon acceptations, or combines them in an unusual manner, or substitutes one for another, apparently for the sake of metre or rhyme. All these are imperfections, and are felt to be such, and evidently arise from a want of care or skill to overcome the difficulties inseparable from metrical composition. The third Canto of *Childe Harold*, although far superior to its predecessors in power of thought, is below them in adequacy of expression and in complete development of ideas; and furnishes numerous instances of the imperfections already described. In this canto, also, there are more passages than in the former ones, in which it is easy to perceive that the turn of thought is rather the result of the rhyme than of the spontaneous suggestions of the writer's free and unimpeded mind. It is difficult, for instance, to conceive that in the following passage he would have introduced the figure in the fifth line, but for the necessity of the rhyme:—

"He, who grown aged in this world of woe,
 In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life,
 So that no wonder waits him ; nor below
 Can love, or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,
 Cut to his heart again with the keen knife
 Of silent, sharp endurance."

This must be felt to be exceedingly harsh, and even incongruous. The figure is bad, and the expression not much better. The phrase, "the keen knife of sharp endurance," attributes the quality of the sufferer to that which inflicts the suffering ; a knife is a weapon of infliction, not an instrument of endurance. The figure is evidently the result of the necessity in which the poet was to find a word rhyming to strife ; the solecism in the thought can have proceeded only from negligence.

In the next stanza, the exactions of the verse are equally perceptible, and the meaning of the poet is but obscurely developed :—

" 'Tis to create, and, in creating, live
 A being more intense, that we endow
 With form our fancy, gaining as we give
 The life we image, even as I do now.
 What am I? Nothing : but not so art thou,
 Soul of my thought ! with whom I traverse earth,
 Invisible but gazing, as I glow
 Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
 And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings dearth."

By the expression in the last line, the poet, I presume, means the desolation of his wounded feelings, but the literal interpretation would be the want or deficiency of wounded feelings. The thought intended to be conveyed is good, but the phrase can hardly be surpassed in harshness, and would never have entered his mind had he been writing blank verse. The whole stanza, I may add, requires more intellectual labour to comprehend it than poetry should ever exact, and in the case of many readers the labour would be vain. It is an example of imperfect development of a train of interesting reflections. The following stanza appears to me a still more remarkable instance of the way in which the poet's thoughts have been shaped—I may even venture to say distorted, by the necessity of providing the prescribed number of rhyming terminations :—

“ Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings ! ye !
 With might, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
 To make these felt and feeling, well may be
 Things that have made me watchful ; the far roll
 Of your departing voices is the knoll
 Of what in me is sleepless,—if I rest.
 But where of ye, oh, tempests ! is the goal ?
 Are ye like those within the human breast ?
 Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high nest ? ”

The last five lines are the mere creatures of the rhyme, and the three concluding ones strike me as quite ludicrous in point of expression. "But where, oh tempests! is the goal of ye?" is a question which I suspect few could ask without a breach of gravity, nor would that dignified quality be greatly strengthened by the subsequent inquiry respecting the nest of a tempest.

Similar harshnesses and puerilities of phraseology will be found in many other parts of the same canto. Speaking of Rousseau, he says, that "he was phrenzied to that worst pitch of all which wears a reasonable show:" of a broken mirror, that "it makes a thousand images of one that was:" of the heart, that "it lives in shatter'd guise."

These are phrases which a good writer would hardly have suffered to pass, had it not been for the illusion of the verse, which sometimes palms expressions on both writer and reader for beautiful or significant, when they are in truth both unlovely and unmeaning.

It may be laid down as a principle, that the composition is imperfect whenever a poet adopts a word, a mode of expression, a peculiar construction, an inversion, an ellipsis, an

image, or a metaphor, which he would not have adopted had the trammels of metre and rhyme left him free to choose. It is very difficult, it is true, to avoid this, but in proportion as it is avoided, the verse will rise in merit and effect. That poetry in which nothing appears to be the consequence of the difficulties to be encountered in this species of composition, is always the most delightful, and dwells the longest on the memory. The passages most frequently quoted are, with few exceptions, all of this kind. In this respect, Pope is conspicuously excellent: so is Gray: so, in many parts of his poetry, is Lord Byron, while in others he is as conspicuously defective. The excellence in question is the result of labour, and the want of it in so powerful a poet, whenever it occurs, shows that in that particular passage he has too soon been content with himself. The truth is, that there must be labour somewhere—either on the part of the poet or on the part of the reader; and it is a little unreasonable in the former to require from the latter what he has himself declined.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XVIII.

Presentiments—Sensitiveness of Women—Description from Lord Byron illustrative of the Subject—How Presentiments are realized—Quickness of the Senses in Matters of deep Interest.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Having had my attention lately drawn to some rather obscure, but interesting feelings of the human mind, it has occurred to me to make them the subject of a letter, convinced that they will be recognised with pleasure in description, by those who have experienced them in reality.

Perhaps there are few men who have not, at some period of their lives, felt a presentiment of approaching events, and taken credit to themselves for sagacity, when the result has corresponded with the anticipation. In some persons there seems to be a peculiar susceptibility of this nature. While the perceptions of all around them are limited to the present,

they appear to have a quickness of apprehension which reaches far into the future, resembling, in some degree, the instinct of those birds which are said to prepare their plumage for the storm, long before it has gathered in the heavens so as to be remarkable to the eye. In general, women have this sensitiveness of apprehension in a greater degree than men ; and in regard to many events, especially such as are not brought about by any intricate combinations formed by the reasoning powers, I should be inclined to place more reliance on the prescient faculty of an inexperienced female, than on that of the man of the world or the profound philosopher. We may apply to the sex what has been so beautifully said of a delicate plant :—

“ Weak with nice sense, the chaste mimosa stands,
From each rude touch withdraws her timid hands ;
Oft, as light clouds o’erpass the summer glade,
Alarmed she trembles at the passing shade ;
And feels alive, through all her tender form,
The whisper’d murmurs of the gathering storm.” *

When we come to look into this subject,

* Darwin—Botanic Garden.

there appears to be nothing particularly wonderful about it. A presentiment is, in fact, a conclusion deduced by the mind from various circumstances, with a rapidity too great to allow it to recollect the steps of the process; being similar, in this respect, to those seemingly intuitive judgments formed by men of almost all professions, regarding the objects appertaining to their regular pursuits. "There is," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "in the commerce of life, as in art, a sagacity which is far from being contradictory to right reason, and is superior to any occasional exercise of that faculty, which supersedes it, and does not wait for the slow progress of deduction, but goes at once, by what appears a kind of intuition, to the conclusion. A man, endowed with this faculty, feels and acknowledges the truth, though it is not always in his power, perhaps, to give a reason for it; because he cannot recollect and bring before him all the materials that give birth to his opinions."*

In a similar way spring up those presentiments of approaching fate under which we

* Discourse.

sometimes labour. By the incidents and appearances around us, a complex impression is made on the mind, for which it scarcely knows how to account. Something unusual has excited its attention, its hopes or its fears, and it grasps all the circumstances of its position, and draws an inference as to the future, with an intuitive quickness, a precision and a truth almost in appearance preternatural.

“Presentiment,” says Madame Roland, “consists in that rapid survey which is made of a crowd of evanescent circumstances impossible to enumerate, which are rather felt than recognised, which give a tinge to the mind that reason cannot justify, but that events ultimately appear to confirm.”*

“Combinations of the mind,” says another writer, “in all matters of deep interest, are formed as quick as thought, and act like the foretellings of prophecy.”†

It is particularly worthy of attention, that in almost all cases of presentiment, a lively interest has been excited in reference to the

* Appeal to Impartial Posterity.

† Hajji Baba, Vol. II. p. 235.

subject of it. It is not the mere love of speculation which sets the mind on interrogating the future, on interpreting present appearances, on pressing forward to meet the "events which cast their shadows before." It is some deep feeling which seizes the indications of what is to come, which expatiates delighted over the lovely prospect on which day has still to dawn, or listens with alarm to the knell that time has not yet heard. How often the anxious mother detects danger in the first little cough of her blooming daughter, and through a long vista of anxious days and wakeful nights, sees the apparition of a tomb!

This prophetic feeling of the future is admirably described by Lord Byron. I might refer you to the passage in his works, but the trouble of the search would interrupt the train of thought into which I have aimed to bring my reader, and I will therefore quote the lines at length. He is speaking of Brussels before the battle of Waterloo :—

"There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium's capital had gathered then
Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men ;

A thousand hearts beat happily ; and when
 Music arose with its voluptuous swell,
 Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,
 And all went merry as a marriage-bell ;—
 But hush ! hark ! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell !

“ Did ye not hear it ?—No ; 'twas but the wind,
 Or the car rattling o'er the stony street ;
 On with the dance ! let joy be unconfined ;
 No sleep till morn, when youth and pleasure meet,
 To chase the glowing hours with flying feet—
 But, hark !—that heavy sound breaks in once more,
 As if the clouds its echo would repeat ;
 And nearer, clearer, deadlier, than before !
 Arm ! arm ! it is—it is—the cannon's opening roar !

“ Within a window'd niche of that high hall
 Sate Brunswick's fated chieftain ; *he did hear*
That sound the first amidst the festival,
And caught its tone with death's prophetic ear ;
 And when they smiled because he deem'd it near,
 His heart more truly knew that peal too well
 Which stretched his father on a bloody bier,
 And roused the vengeance blood alone could quell :
 He rush'd into the field, and, foremost fighting, fell.” *

It is said that Josephine, the first wife of Buonaparte, had a very early presentiment of what would be the issue of his ambitious projects to herself ; and, under this instinctive

* Childe Harold, Canto 3.

apprehension, endeavoured to dissuade him from aspiring to the throne.

She was a true woman, possessed of all her sex's susceptibility of impressions, alive to the possible approaches of evil, and she probably foreboded the coming calamity long before her husband had distinctly conceived the idea of a separation. She may be supposed to have felt as Medora did before the Corsair had disclosed to her his intended departure :—

“This hour we part!—*my heart foreboded this;*
Thus ever fade my fairy dreams of bliss.”

A conjecture may be hazarded, that it was a general, although, perhaps, undefined feeling among mankind, of the prophetic sensitiveness of woman, which raised her so frequently to the sacred office in the temples, which seated her on the tripod at Delphi, and which has, in modern times, so commonly consigned the mysteries of fortune-telling to female hands.

With regard to the accomplishment of these predictions, the verification of these prophetic intimations by subsequent events, the way in which such feelings are produced, and which I have already explained, is surely sufficient to

account for every thing at all wonderful in the matter. Presentiments being formed from a rapid survey of actual circumstances, must often, if there is any accuracy in the operations of the human mind, prove correct. Even amongst a number of random hopes and fears, such as arise in the mind when in the dreamy state of reverie, and have little connexion with any real events, some will almost inevitably be realized, while the major part turn out to be vain and groundless. The former are naturally remembered, and wear in the retrospect the character of prophetic: the latter fade from the mind, and pass away without even a recollection that they have been false in their anticipations. It is generally the event which causes the presentiment to be recollected.

A kindred phenomenon to the prescience of the human mind, or, I might almost say, a constituent part of it, is the quickness of the senses in seizing any indications connected with matters of deep interest. In the passage already cited from Childe Harold, for instance, these two phenomena are combined. "Brunswick's fated chieftain" is represented not only

as catching the distant thunder of the artillery, with Death's prophetic ear, not only as foreboding his approaching fate, but as being the first to hear the sound. And probably every one has experienced in his own case, how much such passions as fear, and hope, and curiosity, and love, have quickened his sensibility to outward impressions.

In Joanna Baillie's fine tragedy of *De Montfort*, there is an instance of this kind which shows the writer's acquaintance with the workings of human passion. *De Montfort* is anxiously expecting, or rather intensely dreading, the arrival of the object of his deep hatred, *Rezenvelt*, whose very sight he detests, but from whom he has consented to receive a visit of conciliation. He stops once or twice in his conversation with his friends, and listens as if he heard something. At length his sister, *Jane de Montfort*, hears the sound also, and the following dialogue ensues :—

Jane. Some one approaches.

Count Freberg. No, no, it is a servant who ascends,
He will not come so soon.

De Montfort. [*Off his guard.*] 'Tis *Rezenvelt*; I heard his
well-known foot,
From the first staircase, mounting step by step.

Count Freberg. How quick an ear hast thou for distant sound !
I heard him not.

This quickness of ear was owing to the depth of his detestation, which had taught him to interpret every sound indicative of the approach of its object, as perfectly as a gentler master, Love, instructs the sensitive girl to distinguish the step and voice of her favoured admirer amidst a hundred others.

When I began this letter, I intended to notice another obscure feeling of the mind, not of a prospective, but of a retrospective character. Having, however, already trespassed beyond the usual limits which I prescribe to myself, with the view of preserving your patience from exhaustion, I will reserve the subject for a future sheet.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XIX.

The Man of Active Life and the Man of Retirement contrasted
—Favourable Position of the latter for observing Mental
Phenomena—Description of a singular Retrospective Feeling
—Attempt to account for it—Notice of a peculiarly vivid Im-
pression sometimes experienced in the Depth of Night.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The last letter which I addressed to you was, I fear, little adapted to interest a man who has too many external cares on his hands to bestow any time on the consideration of obscure and fugitive mental phenomena. Yet you formerly delighted in such speculations, and, trusting to the strength of your early tastes, I will venture to proceed with the design already announced.

When I compare your situation and my own, I am reminded of a passage in a recent writer, which contrasts, in a lively manner, the cir-

cumstances of two poets, and which may be taken as a general picture of the difference between the man of active life and the man of retirement. The one is described as plunging into the world, stemming its flood, and riding upon its waves; the other as loitering about the little pool of his own fancies, throwing crumbs to the gold and silver fish he has put into it.* There may be a good deal of trifling in the employment so fancifully ascribed to the recluse, but it must be recollected that, as he is thus placed at leisure to direct his attention to his own feelings—as he is thus, by the necessity of his position, intent on watching their fluctuating surface and variable hues, he is enabled to mark phenomena which escape observation in the bustle of social pleasure, and the all-engrossing pursuits of business. And although what he thus perceives may be invisible to the man of the world, yet, if it really exists in nature, and is not the consequence of any idiosyncrasy or peculiarity of constitution, it will be recognised in description, and recognised with pleasure by

* *Guesses at Truth*, by Two Brothers, Vol. I. p. 138.

those who would have been incapable of seeing it unless it had been pointed out to their observation. Some of the highest pleasures we receive from the pages of the poet, the moralist, and the philosopher, and, I may add, of the novelist and historian, arise from the vividness with which ideas and feelings before latent in our minds, are presented to our apprehension by the hand of genius, at whose master-touch they stand out in bold relief from the obscurity in which they had previously lurked. We delight to behold, in clear and definite outline, what we have long been dimly conscious of; to see fixed by a powerful spell what we are half aware has often passed through our minds with a rapidity which baffled the efforts of memory to arrest it; to have in palpable shape before us, what has hitherto only emerged from darkness like a spectre, and vanished before we could trace the lineaments. But I find I am making too great "a flourish of trumpets" to usher in the subject which I have to introduce. The obscure feeling to which I alluded in my last letter, and to which I have now to draw your attention, scarcely belongs to the

class just described : I am doubtful whether it will be recognised as soon as pointed out.

I am inclined to think it an effect of a peculiar constitution of the nervous system. I had frequently experienced it myself long before I had met with any one to whom it appeared to be known. It is a fanciful impression in regard to what we are actually engaged in doing,—an impression that the actors, the scene, and all the attendant circumstances, are exactly the same as we have met with before ; that we are, in fact, going through a passage of our lives which we have gone through at some former period of our existence, that we are performing our part for the second time. This feeling I recollect in my own case to have been, on some occasions, vivid but not lasting. In all my multifarious reading, I have never met with more than three writers who appear to have experienced any thing analagous to it—our countrymen, Thomas Hope and Robert Southey, and the celebrated Göthe. The former, with great skill and felicity, describes a similar impression in the following beautiful passage :—

“The sun of the third day was already lengthening the partial shadows that precede its disappearance, when I entered on an extended heath, to whose beautiful and varied weeds heaven’s declining luminary lent at that instant the glowing transparency which announces its proximate setting. With singular force did the gaudy scene revive all the deep-felt impressions which objects of a similar description had once made on my younger mind in the plains of Ak-hissar; or, rather, it produced one of those moments in my life, when my sensations became so exactly the counterpart of what they had once been at some definite prior period, perhaps long gone by, as to suggest the idea of my having, in a new point of space, reverted to an already experienced point of time, and of my going over afresh some former portion of my existence already elapsed.”*

The German author expresses himself with less precision, and, as I am acquainted with the passage only through the medium of a translation, I may be mistaken in supposing

* Anastasius, Vol. III. p. 418.

him to delineate the same feeling so luminously presented to us by the author of *Anastasius*.

“A sentiment,” says Göthe, “which exercised an invincible ascendancy over me, though I have never been able properly to express its singular effect, is the concurrence of a recollection with the impression of the moment, or the feeling of affinity between the past and the present. That sort of contemplative emotion, by which objects separated by time are combined in a single impression, imparts a fantastic colouring to the aspect of the present. I have painted this compound sentiment in many of my lighter productions. It always produces a happy effect in poetry, though it leaves in the mind a singular, inexplicable, and somewhat unsatisfactory impression.”*

Whatever construction may be put upon this passage, there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the third writer whom I have named, as having noticed the obscure impression of which I am at present treating. Southey, in his *Life of Wesley*, adverting to the alleged fulfilment of a prophetic dream, related in the

* *Memoirs of Göthe*, written by Himself.

journal of a religious enthusiast of the name of Nelson, gives us the following commentary upon it:—

“The universal attention which has been paid to dreams in all ages, proves that the superstition is natural; and I have heard too many well-attested facts (facts to which belief could not be refused upon any known laws of evidence), not to believe that impressions are sometimes made in this manner, and forewarnings communicated, which cannot be explained by material philosophy, or mere metaphysics. I do not mean to apply this to such stories as are found in John Nelson’s Journal, or in books of a similar kind; most of them are the effects of a distempered imagination. But the particular instance which has occasioned this note, may be explained by a state of mind which many persons will recognize in their own experience,—a state when we seem to feel that the same thing which is then happening to us has happened to us formerly, though there be no remembrance of it other than this dim recognition.”*

* Life of Wesley, Vol. I. p. 415.

Passing over what is here said of the cause of prophetic dreams (which I conceive for my own part may be accounted for on the same principles as our waking presentiments), I think the passage may furnish us with some clue to a plausible explanation of the mental phenomenon with which we are more immediately concerned. It may be necessary to premise, that Nelson's dream related to Wesley, and is thus noticed in the Journal of the former. "He sate down," says Nelson, "by my fire-side, in the very posture I had dreamed about four months before, and spoke the same words I dreamed he spoke."

If I understand the biographer of Wesley, he says, that Nelson's imagining he had dreamed all this, was an instance of a state of mind which is often experienced when we seem to be going through events that have already happened to us. The inquiry immediately suggests itself--How is it that this peculiar impression of passing through events for the second time is produced? and probably a solution of the difficulty may be found in the supposition, that we had previously dreamed of similar transactions, although we no longer

retain the recollection of having done so. When the actual events occur, the impressions made upon us in our dreams, unattended by any reminiscences of the circumstances in which they were received, are revived by the impressions of the passing moment; and the result of this combination is the peculiar feeling of reiteration, or second experience, already described. The same peculiar feeling might, of course, be owing to any clear mental conceptions, formed in a waking state, which afterwards found their counterpart in real circumstances. If our dreams and presentiments sometimes appear to be realized, it cannot be considered as extraordinary that, when events which correspond with them occur, we should occasionally have forgotten the form of our visions, although we have retained the substance: the impressions we received may remain, while we are totally unconscious how we received them.

You are doubtless aware, that it was one of the doctrines of Socrates,* that all our know-

* Vide the *Phædo* of Plato, and Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, Book I.

ledge is but reminiscence—the revival of ideas which were before familiar to us in a pre-existent state. Whether it was an obscure feeling, analogous to that which I have here attempted to explain, which originally led to this singular opinion, I will not venture to do more than throw out as a passing suggestion. Such obscure and undefined states of consciousness have sometimes, I apprehend, been at the bottom of those strange dogmas which have been started in unintermitting succession by the restless ingenuity of the human intellect; and some of which, to borrow the happy illustration of Dugald Stewart, seem in the lapse of ages to be as regularly reproduced as the tunes of a barrel-organ. The doctrine of a pre-existent state was revived in the last century by Soame Jenyns, and has more recently found a few advocates in America; but in both cases detached from the Socratic theory which resolves all knowledge into reminiscence.

Although I have already prolonged this letter beyond the usual limits, I will venture to advert to another feeling which the thoughtful man sometimes experiences, and which I have seldom seen described; a preternaturally in-

tense impression of the brevity of life, the certain and rapid approach of death, and the awfulness of the infinite future. By this I do not mean the solemnity of mind naturally produced by a contemplation of these grave subjects; nor the terror of the timid or the guilty; nor the gloomy visions of the hypochondriac, founded on peculiar theological doctrines. The state of mind to which I allude may be experienced by men of the most cheerful tempers and the most opposite persuasions, although not perhaps by any but those whose nerves have been made sensible of delicate and refined impressions by intellectual culture and contemplative habits. It is usually in the depth of night when this peculiar feeling comes over the spirit:—

“How solemn, shut within the noiseless room,
To start awake mid night’s profoundest gloom;
To cast around a look of dubious fear,
While not a sound falls on the listening ear!
As if the world had made a dreary pause,
And life in still suspension held her laws.
Cut off from light, from scenes of day remote,
And all that dulls and dissipates the thought,
Freed from the calls of sense, from care’s control,
Then almost disembodied seems the soul,

Laid bare to all the stream of thought that flows
With force resistless on its deep repose.
Ideas how dread, and feelings how sublime !
They leave the world, they spurn the bounds of time;
Almighty power appals our beating hearts;
Close at our side, Death's spectre-shadow starts,
And awed imagination shrinks to see
Th' unveiling prospect of eternity."—(*MS. Poem.*)

A similar state of mind is vividly described in the following passage of a work to which I have already been indebted for several illustrations in the course of writing this series of Letters :—

“ And yet, amid the hurry, toil, and strife,
The claims, the urgencies, the whirl of life,—
The soul—perhaps in silence of the night—
Has flashes, transient intervals of light ;
When things to come, without a shade of doubt,
In terrible reality stand out.
Those lucid moments suddenly present
A glance of truth, as though the heavens were rent ;
And through that chasm of pure celestial light,
The future breaks upon the startled sight :
Life's vain pursuits, and Time's advancing pace,
Appear, with death-bed clearness, face to face ;
And immortality's expanse sublime,
In just proportion to the speck of time :
While Death, uprising from the silent shades,
Shows his dark outline ere the vision fades :

In strong relief, against the blazing sky,
Appears the shadow as it passes by ;
And, though o'erwhelming to the dazzled brain,
These are the moments when the mind is sane." *

I am aware, that in treating of such feelings as these, I am in danger of being unintelligible to the multitude ; and I must console myself with the hope of being understood by some ; of finding " fit readers, though few." At all events, it is useful to mark these peculiarities. The more the unknown regions of the mind are explored, the more its unusual movements are observed and put on record ; and, thus subjected to scrutiny and comparison, the less room there is for the illusions of romance and superstition.

Farewell.

F. R.

* Essays in Rhyme.

LETTER XX.

Propensity of Mankind to Imitation in the Pursuit of Pleasure
—Exemplified in modern social Parties—Analysis of the
Pleasure of Society—Amusement not susceptible of being
long protracted—The Art of managing social Intercourse
yet to be discovered.

• MY DEAR FRIEND,

There is not, perhaps, a commoner mistake in all ranks of society, than performing acts and submitting to customs, not because they are agreeable to ourselves, but because they are deemed pleasant by others. A man seldom thinks of trying to ascertain what objects, what habits, pursuits, or employments, are adapted to give pleasure to his own mind: he seems scarcely ever to consult himself in the business, but, with marvellous disinterestedness, is at much trouble to get to know what circumstances of this kind yield delight to his neighbours, that he may instantly set about placing himself under the influence of the

same. He is naturally, one would think, his own standard ; best knows what suits his taste ; best feels what pleases or displeases his sensitive organs : but, practically, he takes the perceptions of others for the criterion of his own enjoyments. The vane on his own house ought to show him the direction of the wind, but he climbs the adjacent hill, and looks down into the valley beyond, where the gilded toy of his neighbour is sparkling in the sun and veering in the current of the glen, before he ventures to decide how the breeze blows at home. One luckless human being, who has no taste for gaiety, gives and goes to parties from which he receives actual pain ; and for no reason on earth but that the world is positive such things are delightful, and he dreams not for a moment that the world can be mistaken. Another listens for hours to a musical performance under the greatest constraint, and with secret denunciations against the tumult kept up on the tympanum of his ear, purely because he has heard many a gentle soul profess rapture at a concert or an opera. A third buys a stud, and rides after the hounds, although he internally abhors a rapid motion, undulated by

transits over gates and hedges; and at the close of the chase forces himself to boast of the enjoyment he has had, and on no other ground than the general, and to him unaccountable, conspiracy of his friends to extol it as the finest of amusements. A fourth of these sufferers in the cause of pleasure spends hours in drinking wine which he loathes, because his companions put it to their lips with an air of profound conviction that they are enjoying themselves; and poets, besides, have always sung the animating delights of the sparkling cup. The delusion is often carried on till a man really satisfies himself that what he is about must be pleasure; although he cannot help occasionally thinking that pleasure is not very pleasant. It is a sly perverse sort of suspicion which will sometimes intrude itself. On reflection, it seems odd enough that men should go on in this way, feeling uneasiness and discomfort from circumstances of their own creating, and yet keep creating similar circumstances; and all under the idea that it is an agreeable species of occupation. For this folly I really know no cure, but that people, instead of fixing their eyes on their neighbours, should

raise them to the object to be accomplished, and look a little sharper after their own emotions. If some of this self-reflection were practised, I cannot help thinking it would remove many absurdities consecrated by custom, and contribute to the real enjoyments of society. In no matter would it, perhaps, be more useful, than in putting to the test the universal system of visiting and receiving company. Tacitus makes the British chief, Calgacus, say of the Romans, “*Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* ;” they make a solitude, and call it peace. We may say of the gay world of modern days, they make a multitude, and call it pleasure. The plan of giving large entertainments, late at night, and to jostling crowds, has descended from the high to the low, till it pervades the whole land. Social pleasure has turned a midnight hag. Nothing is more certain, however, than that these elaborate parties yield little enjoyment, except to the young and inexperienced ; nothing plainer than that, while they sap the health and steal the bloom from the cheek of beauty, they simultaneously debilitate the mind : yet the notion has rooted itself in

society, that they are fraught with the very essence of delight. A person who habitually enters them, makes up his mind to fancy himself leading a life of pleasure, for his secret distrust is overpowered by the universal acclamation ; and all who are debarred from these brilliant occasions sigh for the bliss from which they are excluded. What power on earth can extirpate a notion which has fastened on the human mind, against the palpable evidence of the senses and the secret testimony of consciousness ? If there were plausible reasons in its favour, it might possibly be exploded ; but seeing that it contradicts our very perceptions, the case, I fear, is hopeless.

If it will not be thought to be “ breaking a butterfly upon a wheel,” I will venture to look for a moment at the elements of which the pleasure of society is composed. We are naturally pleased at being amidst our fellow-creatures ; we listen to their sentiments with sympathy ; our curiosity is gratified by the intelligence they communicate ; nor is it less delightful to play the speaker ourselves, to hear the sound of our own voices, to awaken the sympathetic smile, or bring the light of surprise over the coun-

tenances of our friends : we enjoy the play of wit and raillery and argument ; we take pleasure in doing and receiving, with all due elaboration, little acts of kindness ; in reciprocating gentle titillations of what it would be harsh to call vanity ; in watching, with a kindly sarcastic spirit, the lights and shadows of behaviour ; in looking at fine forms and lovely faces, and even splendid dresses ; and in being looked at ourselves, if, either in fact or in fancy, we can in our turn dazzle the eyes of others with some beauty of person or garb : we love to hear sweet sounds and gaze on pleasant pictures ; and we also feel a gratification in those little appeals which, passing by the more delicate and refined part of our nature at a respectful distance, humbly address themselves to the palate. These are all legitimate enjoyments, valuable in their places, and capable of being tasted without detriment to the health or injury to the mind—nay, even with benefit to both. But mere good sense, bare common discretion, without calling in the aid of philosophy, whispers that these entertainments should not infringe on the hours marked out by nature for renovating the susceptibilities

necessary to enjoy them. Our headlong propensity to carry imitation and push customs to extremes, seems entirely to overlook a fact directly in our path, over which it is wonderful we can avoid stumbling; namely, that from the very constitution of man, amusement cannot be long protracted. The form, indeed, may be tethered to the table, but the spirit is not to be chained. It seems forgotten that, in the words of our great economist, the human stomach has a narrow capacity; that the mind has not a much more extensive one; that, after you have communicated to your friends, and they to you, all that can be interesting, fairly exchanged budgets, which is soon done, there is nothing left but the vacuity which nature abhors; that your stock of spirits, even with the aid of the wine-merchant, is not long in being exhausted, and that the very atmosphere, in losing its salubrity, which a few hours are sufficient to destroy, conspires to read you the same lesson.

What in the world, then, when the appetite is satisfied, when the news has been communicated, when the sentiments have been interchanged, the compliments bandied, the spirits

exhausted,—when the acuteness of the mind is on the wane, the vital element contaminated, the night advancing, all nature tending to collapse, should keep people together? Why should not the gay but spiritless crowd separate, till time has again brought round the desire and capacity of enjoyment.

I will not conceal from you, that this letter has been written the day after assisting at a large party of this kind, and under the influence of that sort of depression which usually follows an unwonted loss of rest. But after making all due allowances for the peculiar medium through which a man is apt to view the pleasures by which his spirits have been exhausted, you will, I think, agree with me, that my representation of modern visiting is substantially correct, and that the system might be greatly improved by a little attention to the objects which it purposes to accomplish.

The art of managing social intercourse, so as to extract from it the greatest amount of pleasure, is yet to be discovered. Our own nation appears peculiarly inexpert in this matter. We mix up too much of the sensual with the social, as if mere mental pleasures,

the pleasures of the imagination, the intellect, and the affections, were too weak to support themselves, without the aid of animal indulgence. I will not undertake to say that there is not considerable truth in this view of the incapacity of mankind to find sufficient enjoyment in society, without the assistance of those sensual gratifications which, after all, are best relished in private, and which, perhaps, true delicacy would withdraw as much as possible from observation. The Italians, who have adopted a different system from ours, do not appear to have succeeded in rendering society more instructive or delightful, if we are to credit those who have had the best opportunities of judging. Landor, in his *Imaginary Conversations*, addressing his Florentine Visitor, says, "The Italian habit of evening *conversazioni*, as those assemblies are called where people do anything rather than converse, produces the same effect on the minds of your countrymen, as brandy does on the bodies of your greyhounds : it stupifies them, takes away their strength, and makes them little all their lives." And Lord Byron, in one of his Letters, tells us that the "*conversazioni* of the Italians

are not society at all. They go to the theatre to talk, and into company to hold their tongues." This is an instance in proof of the inability of human beings to furnish mutual entertainment out of their own mental resources. When they are assembled together without external aids, they are mute: when they have amusement before their eyes, they find no difficulty in conversing. "They manage these things better in France." But it is time to conclude.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XXI.

Purity of Metaphors—Difference in this respect among Writers, owing to a difference in the faculty of Conception—Instances of mixed and pure Metaphors—Pursuing Metaphors too far—Examples.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In the course of my desultory reading, it has often struck me that there is scarcely a greater beauty of style than purity in the employment of metaphors : or, perhaps, I should be more correct in saying, that there is scarcely a greater deformity than the violation of it. The difference between writers is, in this respect, immense. Some of them seem totally insensible to the barbarous transgression of the laws of good taste, which they commit by jumbling together half a dozen inconsistent figures ; while others—they are not many—exhibit a delicate propriety in the use of metaphorical expressions, which seems rather the instinctive tact of exquisite discernment than the effect of any sedulous attention. It is impossible for a

writer to be perspicuous unless he avoids this confusion. Indeed, all clear writers (and all good writers are clear) will be found to be remarkably exempt from the fault. The pure use of metaphors, it cannot be too often repeated, is one of the essential constituents of an excellent style.

The difference between writers in this respect seems to me to depend chiefly on the degree in which they are endowed with that intellectual faculty, which in the nomenclature of modern metaphysicians is denominated "conception;" that power which presents to the mind ideas of objects not actually present to the senses. I suspect there is a greater disparity in this faculty than is generally supposed. In some men it is so strong, that the mere conception of things seems as vivid and as capable of affecting the feelings, as the actual presence of the objects themselves. They live in a sort of intellectual panorama, where ideas stand out with all the distinctness of their material models. There are others, on the contrary, who, without any inability of recollection, seem destitute of the power of strongly conceiving the ideas which they

retain. They are consequently little moved by mere intellectual representations, and are susceptible of vivid affections only from impressions on the senses. They have no mental picture-gallery, no exhibition within themselves: their enjoyments are all external; their world lies without.

It is quite natural that the former class, the men of vivid conceptions, should be acutely sensible to any violation of purity in metaphors. A metaphor, if addressed to the sight, is an image, and, if addressed to the other senses, is something equivalent to it. By their power of conception, the image is presented to their mind's eye as distinctly as if it were invested in a material and visible shape; and hence it is almost impossible that they should spontaneously represent it to themselves in any incongruous character or situation; and equally impossible that they should not be displeased when any luckless writer is guilty of bringing before them the same incongruity.

But if a man has no power of forming vivid conceptions, he cannot be similarly affected by figurative discrepancies. He is in a great degree insensible to them. If the actual ob-

jects were before him in the circumstances described in the mixed metaphor, he would be instantly sensible of the absurdity committed ; but as long as they are presented to him only by words, he is scarcely alive to any thing but the general meaning which the figure is intended to elucidate.

It may be worthy of notice also, that this power seems to have no direct connexion with facility of association. A man's ideas may be copious,—one may readily suggest another ; he may pour forth an exuberance of figures ; he may appear to have great fertility of fancy ; and yet have no power of strongly and vividly conceiving the ideas of which his mind is so prolific. In this case, he will be exceedingly liable to trespass against propriety in the use of metaphorical expressions. The truth of these remarks will perhaps be rendered more conspicuous by a few examples.

It seems almost impossible that the following sentence, taken from a popular critical journal of the day, should have been written by a man of strong powers of conception. Speaking of a celebrated general, who, by maintaining the

same discipline in peace as in war, had made his army factious, the writer says :—

“ We have been reluctantly compelled to mark this fatal error of Lord Beresford’s, because this Penelopean disorganization of his army, that backbone of a demoralized state, affords the only satisfactory clue to the labyrinth of revolutions under which Portugal has since groaned.”

Here the writer speaks of a disorganization (and that a Penelopean one) of a backbone affording a clue to a labyrinth; and represents Portugal, not as involved or bewildered in the labyrinth, but as groaning under it. It would be difficult to bring together incongruities more incongruous.

I am furnished with another instance of faulty metaphor, by no less a writer than Jeremy Taylor, who is more distinguished for the exuberance of his imagination than for precision of thought.

“ The obedience of faith, and the labour of love, and the contentions of chastity, and the severities of temperance and self-denial, are not such insuperable mountains but that an honest

and sober person may perform them in acceptable degrees, if he have but a ready ear, and a willing mind, and an honest heart.”*

To perform “mountains” would certainly be a whimsical, if not an impossible, achievement. The fault has evidently arisen from the figurative expression not having called up in the writer’s mind any other than the general idea of difficulty. Had it presented to his conception the particular image denoted, he could scarcely have fallen into so glaring an incongruity.

I will cite one more example to show the marvellous ease with which faults of this nature are committed by our best writers. Addison, who is not peculiarly remarkable for correctness in the use of figurative language, has the following passage in the seventh number of the Spectator :—

“I know but one way of fortifying my soul against those gloomy presages and terrors of mind, and that is, by securing to myself the friendship and protection of that Being, who disposes of events and governs futurity. He

* Sermon on 2 Cor. v. 10.

sees, at one view, the *whole thread of my existence*, not only that part of it which I have already passed through, but that which runs forward into all the depths of eternity."

As the latter clause stands, he represents himself as passing through a thread, an incongruity which deforms a sentence otherwise unexceptionable.

In addition to these instances of mixed metaphors, I will seize the occasion to present you with a few examples of pure ones. Dr. South, in one of his sermons, which contains a striking, and, I may add, a fanciful description of the human faculties in Paradise, includes hope in the number, and proceeds to say:—

"It is not imaginable that Adam could fix upon such poor thin enjoyments as riches, pleasure, and the gayeties of an animal life. Hope, indeed, was always the anchor of the soul, yet certainly it was not to catch or fasten upon such mud."

An inferior writer, after employing the metaphor in the first clause of the latter sentence, would probably have abandoned it, and have adopted literal phraseology in the second. It

is, in fact, in proceeding with a metaphor beyond the first proposition into which it is introduced, that the skill of a writer is put to the test. While it is employed in only a single proposition, it is in many cases difficult, in others impossible, for the most unskilful to blunder. Such succinct figures are often full of life and beauty; as, for instance, Mrs. Wolstonecraft's expression in one of her letters from Norway:—"All my nerves keep time with the melody of nature." D'Alembert, in his reflections on style, happily designates an insensible mind as a harpsichord without strings, from which it is impossible to draw any sound. Southey, in his Colloquies, has combined novelty and force in speaking of the tribe of money-getters—"Men whose souls can hardly be conceived of as any thing else than glands for secreting lucre." It would be easy to point out a number of ingenious and original metaphors of this succinct kind, in the writings of Hazlitt. He tells us, with, perhaps, as much satire as ingenuity, that Moore converts the wild harp of Erin into a musical snuff-box; and that Lord Byron shuts himself up in the

Bastile of his own ruling passions.* South, to whose striking description of man before the fall I have already adverted, illustrates the subject very happily when he says—"We may collect the excellence of the understanding then, by the glorious remainders of it now, and guess at the stateliness of the building by the magnificence of the ruins."

In all such cases as these, it would be difficult to violate the purity of the figure, because the metaphor consists in a single point of resemblance; there is only one quality, or act, or function described; and, therefore, although the metaphor may be intrinsically bad, it cannot offend in respect of incongruity of parts.

It is, as I before remarked, when the metaphor is pursued beyond the first proposition, or beyond a single point of analogy, that the danger of misemploying it occurs. The following passage from Milton, in which that vigorous writer has successfully preserved the consistency of his figure, will illustrate my meaning: "Truth is compared in Scripture to a

* Spirit of the Age.

streaming fountain : if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition." * The metaphor here consists of two parts, which perfectly harmonize, and leave nothing for the imagination to desire or for the critic to reprehend.

It may be remarked, too, that when we venture beyond a single point of analogy, there is some danger of pursuing the resemblance too far, and offending by an excess of ingenuity. In such cases of elaborate adaptation, the writer displeases by showing that his love of display, or, possibly, the enjoyment he derives from the mere exercise of dexterity without any ulterior object, is predominant over his desire to enforce his sentiments or explain his subject. This fault is not infrequent in the writings of a celebrated author of the present day, who evinces an inexhaustible fertility in the art of discovering analogies ; and it is, I think, remarkably conspicuous in the following passage from his *Life of Sheridan* :—

“ It was natural that the greater portion of

* *Areopagitica*, a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing.

that unemployed, and, as it were, homeless talent, which in all great communities is ever abroad on the wing, uncertain where to settle, should now swarm round the light of the new principles."

This must be acknowledged to be a display of no ordinary expertness, but it illustrates no truth, and is rather the dexterous feat of a mind desirous to exhibit its agility, and alighting on the very spot from which it had sprung, than the well-directed effort of a man anxious to make a progress. A similar excess of ingenuity is discoverable in the following passages from the same work: "It is not a little curious, in turning over his [Sheridan's] manuscripts [of the *School for Scandal*] to see how the outstanding jokes are kept in recollection upon the margin, till he can find some opportunity of funding them to advantage in the text." In reference to one of Sheridan's speeches, it is said: "The reporter of the speech has, as usual, contrived, with an art near akin to that of reducing diamonds to charcoal, to turn all the brilliancy of his wit into dull and opaque verbiage." This last is, indeed, an instance of simile rather than of metaphor, but it partakes

of the same character as the other two. In the shape of a metaphor it would, in fact, have appeared less formal and laboured. Metaphors are almost always preferable to similes when the allusion is perfectly understood, and in this chymical age the figure here employed would have been generally intelligible.

A very happy metaphor, which I recently met with, may wear, at first sight, the appearance of being too sustained or protracted, in the same way as the examples last adduced ; but, on closer inspection, it will be found that the analogy is restricted to a single point, and that the length of the figure arises from an explanatory amplification. The writer is speaking of a republican sect rising up amongst the middle classes in this country, and whom he designates "as men whose minds have been put in training for violent exertion. All that is merely ornamental—all that gives the roundness, the smoothness, and the bloom, has been exuded. Nothing is left but nerve, and muscle, and bone."*

Amongst the metaphors adduced by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, I have not been able to

* *Edinburgh Review*, June 1827, p. 261.

find one in which the analogy is carried on beyond a single point. Nor are they remarkable for their elegance or ingenuity. The most beautiful figure cited by him is, perhaps, the saying of Pericles, "That the youth which had perished in the war, had vanished from the city as if the spring had been taken from the year." It is singular, however, that he should present this to his readers as a metaphor, when it is obviously in the form of a simile.

In the instances of faulty metaphor which I have now cited, it is plain, I think, that had the respective writers had vivid conceptions of the imagery which they employed, they could not have fallen into such incongruities. This clearness or vividness of conception is probably, in a great measure, the gift of nature, but it may, like other faculties, be greatly improved by judicious cultivation. A writer, let his natural endowments in this respect be ever so scanty, may acquire the habit of drawing out, in imagination, the metaphorical ideas which he employs, and thus enable himself to mark any inconsistencies by which they may happen to be disfigured. And he will find that a habit of this kind, which is by no means of difficult

acquisition, will not only confer perspicuity on his style, but put into his hands a test by which to try the style of others, as well as enhance the enjoyment presented to him in the pages of our purest and most imaginative writers.

But I must here stop. On looking back, I find I have accumulated example on example till my letter has outgrown the usual size. How easy would it have been to fill twice the space with those flowers of rhetoric which bloom in the wilderness of my library!

Adieu.

F. R.

LETTER XXII.

Salutary Effect of frequent Intercourse with our Fellow Creatures—Conversation useful independently of adding to our Knowledge—Variety of Characters in every Society—Specimens—Minds requiring Excitement to bring them to the point of Efficiency.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Retired as I profess to live, and much as I enjoy seclusion, I make it a point to mix almost daily in society. It seems necessary to the healthful state of the mind to associate habitually with our fellow-creatures on easy and familiar terms. When we intermit for any long period this salutary intercourse, we seem to lose in correctness of feeling and soundness of judgment. Men and things no longer maintain in our views their true relative positions. Some become too prominent; others fade into unmerited indistinctness; some are unduly elevated, others unjustly depressed; and all this from not having

our impressions renewed and corrected by a comparison with those of other people. Good sense and tact consist in a great measure in knowing the effect of circumstances on the minds of others, and this can be ascertained only by freely mixing with them. I cannot, therefore, entirely agree with Lord Bolingbroke, where he says—"When I, who pass a great part—very much the greatest part, of my life alone, sally forth into the world, I am very far from expecting to improve myself by the conversation I find there; and still further from caring one jot for what passes there."*

It is true, I seem to myself, on any given occasion, to learn very little from ordinary conversation. In trying afterwards to recollect what new ideas I have gathered, I may not, perhaps, succeed in finding any which can fairly rank under that description; but, if I have acquired no new ideas, I have, at all events, ascertained what old ones are in the minds of those with whom I have been conversing.

By this freedom of intercourse, I keep up

* Letter 212, Vol. II.

my knowledge of the moral and intellectual state of my fellow-creatures, which is, perhaps, quite as useful as maintaining my familiarity (pleasant though it be) with Latin and Greek. I have, also, my social feelings, and particularly my sympathies, exercised ; which, doubtless, preserves a man from a thousand little oddities and errors, and cherishes that current kindness and urbanity of which the more rigid recluse often finds the want. It was the remark of a very shrewd and sensible observer of mankind (I mean Mr. Jefferson, the American statesman), in writing to some of his friends respecting his return home after a long residence in Europe, that he considered it would be no small advantage to have an opportunity of resuming the tone of mind of his constituents, which is lost by long absence, and can be recovered only by mixing with them. There is, in the same way, a tone of human nature in general, as well as of particular classes, which every man should keep up, and which is equally in danger of being lost by absenting ourselves from the society of our fellow-creatures.

In freely associating with my country neigh-

bours, if I am sometimes repelled by want of classical culture, I am also sometimes irresistibly attracted by native vigour of mind. I have long ago discovered that there is a great difference between being literary and being intellectual. It is not rare to meet with men of letters who have no claim to the latter appellation; while, on the other hand, there are hundreds of individuals of great intellectual power, who, although in the habit of freely exercising their faculties, have little of that sort of cultivation of mind which is designated by the term literary, and might readily fall into mistakes which schoolboys would readily correct. In some of these I have frequently witnessed a glow of mind produced by the conception of comprehensive views, which is never found in a feeble intellect. It would, unquestionably, be an advantage if they possessed as much literary knowledge as would enable them to keep clear of such palpable errors as afford the small man of literature an opportunity of placing himself, in his own conceit, immeasurably above them. These errors, however, detract little from the real power of their conversation, and the same

literary ignorance which betrays them into blunders, causes them to pour forth their intellectual affluence without any of that parsimonious reservation which I have sometimes suspected in literary men to be a deliberate retention of good things for the press.

I must own, however, that the conversation which it commonly falls to my lot to hear, is not in itself very instructive; or only becomes so, by stimulating my powers of thought, and exercising my discrimination of character. In this view, the variety of minds to be found, even in the dullest society, may afford perpetual interest and amusement, to any one who will bestow as much attention on moral and intellectual characteristics, as the naturalist lavishes on the imperceptible distinctions in mosses and lichens. Take the following as a sample of my botanizing in the fields of human nature.

One great difference among men in society is, that some individuals seem always at the talking pitch, while others are habitually below it. My circle of acquaintance at the present time presents me with a marked specimen of each; a description of them may help you to my meaning.

Waller is a man of active and energetic temperament, busy, bustling, and somewhat vain. In company, he is scarcely ever silent ; he has always something to say ; generally several stories to tell ; news to communicate ; decided opinions to express ; remarks to make on all persons and things ; antipathies and likings to give vent to ; feelings of all sorts, on all sorts of occasions, to describe ; and all these stories, pieces of intelligence, opinions, remarks, expressions of approbation, denunciations of dis-favour, and descriptions of emotion, flow forth without any apparent effort. It is a loose and desultory, but on the whole not an unanimating, procession, and invariably pleases those who have never witnessed it before. His friends will sometimes archly smile at each other, when they can escape unobserved into an adjoining room, and vent their admiration by saying, " He is *at it*, as usual." Such a man's ideas are always at hand, always ready for every emergency, and not only his ideas, but his talents and passions, are perpetually on the alert. He thinks promptly, as far as his power of thinking extends, and he feels instantly the passion or emotion to which the

nature of his mind determines him. He is, therefore, always prepared to act.

In most of these respects, Templeman is a direct contrast. In ordinary intercourse, he seems as if he could hardly express himself with passable fluency. He prefers remaining silent, if any one will take the trouble (for such it appears to be to him) of talking; and in consequence of the identical propositions and puerilities of phrase which escape from his lips, when the necessities of his position oblige him to do violence to his nature by opening them, the hearer acquiesces with perfect content in the propriety of his preference. Thus, he frequently passes for a good sort of innocent, dull man: but if any thing extraordinary should happen to excite his feelings, such as an interesting occurrence, meeting an old friend, or coming in contact with a man of talent, his superficial incapacity instantly drops off, he emerges from his chrysaline state of mental inactivity, and soars an eloquent and intellectual being. While in this fit of excitement, he as greatly transcends the ready every-day talker, as he falls below him in the usual routine of social intercourse. This peculiarity

is, in a great measure, the result of natural temperament, enhanced, however, by the circumstance of not having been early brought into frequent daily collision with his fellow men on equal terms.

This cast of character is seen in other things besides conversation. You may observe the same habitual sinking below the common level in respect of such qualities as courage, firmness, and decision. In some persons, these energetic qualities are not drawn out by ordinary circumstances, and hence superficial observers are apt to fall into practical mistakes. They rashly presume on the apparent tameness of such a character, and to a certain extent they may presume with impunity; but if they happen, under this impression, to transgress a limit of which they are totally unaware, the hitherto passive man bursts forth with an energy that makes the crowd draw back with fear and astonishment. We are reminded, in such cases, of Gray's admired description of the whirlwind—

“That, hush'd in grim repose, expects his evening prey.”

It is the same with regard to acuteness or

capability of comprehension. Men of considerable powers seem occasionally to be so deficient in this quality as to fall into whimsical mistakes and obvious follies ; because, in fact, they frequently look on things with a laziness of attention which is easily foiled by the slightest difficulty, till some powerful motive concentrates the force of their faculties, and then they see the subject, whatever it may be, with almost preter-natural distinctness.

Owing to a similar habitual deficiency of tone in the mind, a similar depression of the feelings, if I may so express it, below *the point of action*, I have known men full of indecision and procrastination in small affairs, while they have been prompt and determined in business of importance. It would appear as if a certain force of motive must be created before they can act. Sometimes this seems to be effected by one great object, sometimes by the gradual accumulation into a mass of many petty motives,—as when a multiplicity of unimportant procrastinations have created an uneasiness, which can be appeased only by a vigorous exertion to sweep off the whole arrear at a blow. Such men are indecisive and di-

latory in the detail of their lives, known, perhaps, to themselves alone; but as this defect in their mental constitution rectifies itself when it has reached a certain height, they appear, in the results visible to the eyes of the world, as decided and punctual characters.

It is an analogous fact, that many practised writers, in both prose and poetry, are usually in their feelings below the *writing point*, and require to be raised by a little extraordinary excitement before they can succeed in producing any thing of value. For this purpose some have recourse to music, some to the works of a favourite author, and others wait with patience till the movements of their own minds have spontaneously brought round the fit.

It was this that Lord Byron meant when he said, in one of his letters, that "A man's poetry is a distinct faculty or *soul*, and has no more to do with the every day individual, than the inspiration with the Pythoness when removed from her tripod;" and again, in another place, "I can never get people to understand that poetry is the expression of *excited passion*, and that there is no such thing

as a life of passion any more than a continuous earthquake or an eternal fever."

There are men, however, who are fortunate enough to be always at the writing point; who can sit down any day, and at any hour, in the enviable certainty of producing a composition equal to any of their antecedent achievements. I suspect that in such cases the product (if in verse, at least) must be referred to that celebrated class of writings, the producers of which, according to Horace, are tolerated by neither gods nor men:—

"Mediocribus esse poetis,

Non Dii, non homines, non concessere columnæ."

I had written thus far, when, happening to look into Warner's Literary Recollections, I found a passage so strikingly illustrative of some of the preceding observations, that I cannot refrain from introducing it to your acquaintance. Speaking of a Captain Rogers, of the Royal Navy, the author says:—

"The cast of Rogers's character was of a curious description. When not under excitement—or rather, when not engaged in his pro-

fession—there was a languor about him, which might be mistaken either for apathy or affectation; and they who knew him not, would have supposed that he had adopted the vacuity of Meadows in Cecilia, and the delicacy of Lord Ogilby in the Clandestine Marriage, as the best models of imitation in general carriage. But nothing could be more false than such an estimate as this. It was merely the stillness of a spirit that required a stimulus for its development. The instant *this* was applied, torpor vanished; indifference disappeared; “the frame of adamant and soul of fire” stood confessed in all their splendour: and vigour of intellect; solidity of judgment; wisdom in devising means; and the most desperate daring in effecting results, characterised the mind and actions of this extraordinary man.”

For an interesting account of his exploits, perfectly consonant with the high character here given of him, I must refer you to the work which has supplied me with this happy illustration.

Farewell.

F. R.

LETTER XXIII.

Tendency in Mankind to exaggerate the Unknown—Exemplified in those whom English Reserve keeps at a distance from each other—An Anecdote in Illustration.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is a remark of some philosopher (perhaps Locke), that when people of opposite sentiments candidly compare their opinions, they find the difference between them much less than they had apprehended. The fact in such cases is, that the opposite parties unconsciously exaggerate the points of disagreement, and the discrepancy actually existing sinks on inquiry to even less than its real dimensions. It is one of the many illustrations furnished by human life of the proverbial truth, "omne ignotum pro magnifico." The unknown, or the partially known, is always a field for the

imagination. What a number of ingenious hypotheses we form, what a variety of etherial castles we build, what a multiplicity of visionary cases we put, respecting some point which we cannot exactly ascertain! And when we at length have succeeded in getting to know what was so long hid from us, how magnificent beyond all sobriety, how ludicrously extravagant, or inconceivably wide of the mark, our preconceptions appear! How poor and insignificant often the sober truth which displaces them!

We are peculiarly apt in this way to exaggerate both the good and the bad qualities of those with whom we are acquainted only by report. Perhaps one or two slender facts are known to us, and imagination busily supplies the rest. This tendency manifests itself in a thousand amusing modes, but on the present occasion I purpose to select for illustration only one, which is frequently to be observed in English society. In our country towns, I have often been struck with the singular reserve and distance of behaviour exhibited to each other by parties, who ought, according to all reasonable calculation, to be intimately acquainted, but who conduct themselves as if

they had been brought together for the first time from the opposite quarters of the globe. They have never, it appears, been introduced through the usual forms to a personal acquaintance, and, under the spell of this insuperable deficiency, they agree to regard one another with an air of mixed sullenness and defiance, as if they felt suspicious of mutual disdain and ill-will. If they are in the habit of meeting in the street, or any place of public resort, without introduction, yet each with a perfect knowledge of the name and circumstances of the other, they seem to gather themselves up at every encounter into a sort of *noli me tangere* isolation, and entrench their personal consequence behind looks of haughtiness and reserve. They remind me of the two Indians, who, as the story goes, meeting and mistaking one another for enemies, each retreated behind the shelter of the nearest tree, and there they might have remained till doomsday, without daring to stir a step, for fear of the consequences of making any advance, had they not casually discovered, after they had suffered the torture of being imprisoned six hours in their own terrors, that they belonged to the same tribe.

A similar discovery is sometimes made by the punctilious characters I have been describing. Should some incident make two of these formal self-isolated beings acquainted with each other, all the surmises cherished to their mutual disadvantage prove to be sheer phantoms of the imagination. They actually discover one another to be human beings. They are surprised by kind feelings, where they expected austere dispositions; they meet with generous instead of proud thoughts, suavity instead of harshness of manner, and a ready willingness to interchange civilities and return good offices. It turns out that, victims of a morbid fancy, they have both been concealing themselves in purely gratuitous alarm behind the very effectual but needless shelter of a repulsive aspect.

An incident which lately occurred in our neighbourhood gave rise to these remarks. Clarence and Annesley are men of property, and in every sense highly respectable; the former is an independent gentleman of an ancient family—the latter an eminent merchant, opulent and liberal. They live at too great a distance from each other to be considered as neighbours, but as their houses lie in the same

direction from the nearest town, they frequently meet each other on the road. The magical ceremony of an introduction, however, had never enabled them on these occasions to relax the stiffness of an upright attitude. Something of the repulsive feeling already described had grown up between them, and it had been recently fomented by a dispute between a tenant of the one and a clerk of the other; the tenant asserting with great positiveness that he had paid some money to the clerk in discharge of a debt due to Annesley, and the clerk affirming, with equal confidence and pertinacity, that he had never received it. No acknowledgment or receipt for the money could be produced.

Clarence being a kind landlord, not averse to extend his assistance and protection to all dependent on him, took up the cause of his tenant, whom he esteemed an honest man, and wrote a letter to Annesley in his favour, in which he evidently considered the clerk as taking advantage of the loss of the receipt, and expressed himself as somewhat personally aggrieved. Annesley had a high opinion of the punctuality and integrity of his clerk, and felt

inclined to consider the tenant as little better than a rogue who wished to escape from a just obligation under the shelter of his landlord's good word. He saw, however, that it was useless to reply to the letter in kind; that they might correspond for ever without coming to a satisfactory conclusion; and that some other method must be pursued, to terminate an affair beginning to grow excessively disagreeable. One morning, at breakfast, he talked the matter over with his only daughter, his darling and confidant, whom, since the loss of her mother, he had installed in the pleasant office of supplying him with inducements for doing as he liked, and of returning to him his own reasons, softened by the gentleness and embellished with the graces of the female mind.

It happened that Miss Annesley had received some recent attentions, by no means displeasing, from the heir of the Clarence estate, while she was visiting in the neighbourhood; and whether it was from a tender recollection of these, or from that disinterested kindness of heart which leads the gentler sex at all times to prevent and compose feuds and enmities—

certain it is, that she urged her father to seek an immediate personal interview with his correspondent; and, after exerting all the force of her eloquence till an unusual colour bloomed on her beautiful cheeks, she succeeded in persuading him to a step on which he had already determined.

His reception at Clarence Hall was stiff and formal. He saw at a glance that his visit was unwelcome, and that he had to do with a man strongly prepossessed against him. At first he felt inclined to conduct himself in the same ungracious spirit; but, being a man of the world, accustomed to control his first impulses, he checked the nascent disposition, and addressed his neighbour with a manly frankness and sincere desire to clear up mistakes and compose differences.

"Mr. Clarence," he began, "the object of my present visit is to adjust the unpleasant affair which occasioned the letter you did me the honour to address to me a few days ago. A personal interview appeared to me the readiest mode of attaining the end. We have both, I am persuaded, the same simple purpose in view—to ascertain what is right,

and to act accordingly. After examining my clerk with all the acuteness and impartiality of which I am master, I am convinced he has never received the money: you, on the other hand, are equally convinced that your tenant has paid it. There appear, then, to be only three modes of proceeding: one, to let the matter rest, with a sense of injustice remaining on the mind of one of the parties; another to have recourse to a court of law, at a great expense of money and peace of mind; the third, to refer the matter to arbitration. A man really desirous of justice can scarcely fail to prefer the last; and, if your tenant acquiesce in the proposal, we will take that course on the present occasion. You yourself shall be the arbitrator, and whatever decision you may come to, after hearing both sides, shall be final and unquestioned."

At the commencement of this address, Clarence had positively determined to remain fixed in his opinion; he had assumed a deliberate sternness of both feeling and expression, and had resolved not to relax a muscle of either mind or body. What was said, however, was uttered with so much candour, in so gentle-

manly a tone, and with such evident fairness of purpose, that all his notable resolutions were put to flight: the scowl left his brow, the austerity vanished from his heart, and a pithy retort which he had prepared to emit at the conclusion of his neighbour's sophistical or offensive harangue (for one of these he had in his own mind predetermined it should be) never saw the light. He met the proposal with perfect frankness and good will, and objected at the outset only to that part of it which referred the decision of the case to himself—an objection afterwards abandoned. It ultimately turned out that the tenant, a man of no great quickness of intellect, had inclosed the money in a letter, which he had forgotten to send to its address, and, on a sudden recollection, he discovered that he had carefully stowed it away in an old pocket-book.

From this auspicious moment Clarence and Annesley became fast friends. They found in each other a congeniality of spirit at which they were utterly surprised—integrity, urbanity, delicacy, cultivation of mind; in fact, no two men in the whole country were more exactly suited to confer mutual pleasure by personal inter-

course, and yet for years they had been kept asunder, although almost neighbours, by the absurd reserve and sullen coldness of English etiquette or English manners.

The young folks, I may add, became as suddenly and entirely harmonious as the parents ; and it is currently reported that the frequent meetings of the latter to taste “ the feast of reason,” are outnumbered by those of the former to enjoy the “ flow of soul.”

Farewell.

F. R.

THE END.

